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IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Iraq: Situation and treatment of Christians, particularly in the north, the Kurdistan region, and Baghdad; government protection and support programs (2017–September 2020) [IRQ200350.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources state that the Christian population in Iraq has been declining [since the US-led invasion in March 2003 (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.46)] from an estimated population of between 800,000 and 1.4 million Christians, before 2002, to "fewer than 250,000" (US 10 June 2020, 3; Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.46). The same sources further indicate that 67 percent of the Christians remaining in Iraq are Chaldean Catholics, an "eastern rite of the Roman Catholic Church," "nearly" 20 percent are Assyrian, and the remaining are Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, and Anglican and other Protestants; there are approximately 2,000 "registered members" of evangelical Christian churches in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and an "unknown number" of "mostly" converts from Islam practising in secret (US 10 June 2020, 3; Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.46). Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) cites estimates by Christian groups as indicating that between 10 and 22 Christian families left Iraq per day in 2018 (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.46).

1.1 Internal Displacement and Returns

A February 2019 survey on displaced ethnic and religious groups by the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicates that when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL); Islamic State (IS); Daesh] took control of the Ninewa [Nineveh] Plains and west Ninewa areas in the Ninewa Governorate, approximately 60,000 Christians were displaced from the area by March 2015 (UN Feb. 2019, 7). Minority Rights Group International (MRG) similarly states that the advance of ISIS in Mosul caused "almost all Christian families" in the area to flee by July 2014, and by August 2014, the ISIS takeover of "all Assyrian areas in the Ninewa plains," where 50,000 resided, caused a "second wave of displacement" towards the KRI (MRG Nov. 2017a). The US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* cites the IOM as indicating that as of December 2019, there were a total of 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDP) in Iraq, and further cites the Joint Crisis Coordination Center of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as indicating that 7 percent of IDPs were Christians (US 10 June 2020, 4).

Sources report that "at least" 200,000 Christians were concentrated in the Ninewa Plain and the KRI (US 10 June 2020, 3; Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.46). A September 2017 report on Iraqi Christians by the Middle East Research Institute (MERI), an Erbil-based non-profit organization aiming to contribute to the "process of state building and democratisation in the Middle East," indicates that the remaining Christian population were located in Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, the Ninewa Plains, and the Erbil and Duhok governorates in the KRI (MERI Sept. 2017, ii, 5). Mark Lattimer, Director of the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights (Ceasefire) [1], who gave a presentation on minorities and vulnerable groups during a meeting on Iraq organized by the EU's European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in April 2017, indicated that

[t]he majority [of Christians] now live in the KRG, particularly in a Christian district of Erbil called Ankawa [Ainkawa]. Many of the Christians in Iraq believe that the Christians of Iraq do not have a hope of surviving beyond that enclave. There are remaining Christian populations in Baghdad, in Basra, and there are many Christians who hope to return to the Nineveh plain. (Lattimer July 2017, 20)

The February 2019 IOM survey indicates that Mosul and the Ninewa plains have been retaken from ISIS, but the number of returns among ethnic and religious groups, including Christians, "remains low" (UN Feb. 2019, 7). The 2020 annual report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) cites "sources in Iraq" as indicating that "only" an estimated 30 to 50 percent of the population of Christians have "likely" returned to their communities of origin since the fall of ISIS in late 2017, mostly from Erbil and other parts of the KRI (US 28 Apr. 2020, 73). The same source further states that the "majority of Iraqi Christians remained displaced and their challenges even after return have been significant" (US 28 Apr. 2020, 72). The February 2019 IOM survey, based on interviews with 1,605 returnees and IDPs in nine governorates across Iraq and the KRI including Ninewa, Erbil and Baghdad, found that 112 out of 200 Christians interviewed by the IOM "express[ed] concerns" about not being welcomed in their place of origin; among IDPs, 22 percent of Christian respondents planned to return and 42.5

percent planned to relocate abroad; among returnees, 39 percent of Christian respondents had "long-term" plans to move abroad (UN Feb. 2019, 5, 6). The same survey further states that 49 percent of Christian returnee households reported that they "perceive[d] no significant difference between their lives in displacement and after return" (UN Feb. 2019, 16).

2. Situation and Treatment of Christians

The report for a joint fact-finding mission (FFM) conducted by Landinfo, an independent body within the Norwegian Immigration Authorities (Norway n.d.), and the Danish Immigration Service cites their interview with an Iraq analyst as indicating that the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) [Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) (Denmark and Norway Nov. 2018, 9)] [2] target people showing "signs of deviating morality," including Christians selling liquor (Denmark and Norway Nov. 2018, 47). Australia's DFAT reports that Christians operating liquor stores with permits "regularly" receive threats from some PMF groups and individuals who are against the sale of alcohol (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.49). Lattimer of Ceasefire stated that

the public practice of selling and buying [alcohol] is widely seen as immoral. There are some communities associated with the [practice] – Christians and Ka'kai – which has been given as a reason for their persecution. ... [T]he charge of being an alcohol seller[] attaches a stigma to someone, by reason even of ethnic or religious identity – there is also a pattern of those who do sell alcohol being targeted by Shia militias in Basra and Baghdad – Asaib Ahl al-Haq has carried out assassinations, death threats, forcing people out of the community, or sometimes just using it as [an] allegation to get someone to leave or get them to leave their property. (Lattimer July 2017, 23)

Sources report that in February 2018, several gunmen killed a Christian man, who received threats about selling alcohol near a Muslim neighbourhood in Baghdad (US 21 June 2019, 2; Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.49).

The February 2019 IOM survey found that 24 percent of respondents among Christian IDPs reported being unemployed (UN Feb. 2019, 10). MRG reports that Chaldean Christian IDP households living in Basra or the KRI, like other displaced minorities, faced "difficulties in finding employment" (MRG Nov. 2017b). A survey of Christians in Ninewa conducted by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) International, a Catholic aid organization funding projects worldwide, based on surveys completed by 793 Christians, found that 45 percent of survey respondents were unemployed, including 67 percent of respondents aged 25 and under (ACN International June 2020, 4, 56, 75). The same survey found that many respondents suggest that the government is "not interested in hiring Christian graduates, who were traditionally well-represented in some civil service and educational careers" (ACN International June 2020, 64). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* states that the Iraqi government extended the contracts of "several hundred" Christian employees and transferred their jobs working for the Iraqi government to the KRG, while continuing to pay their salaries (US 10 June 2020, 16).

A December 2018 article by Al-Monitor, an online news publication focusing on the Middle East and North Africa (Al-Monitor n.d.), cites a survey by the Masarat Foundation for Cultural and Media Development (MCMD), an Iraq-based non-profit organization focusing on "minorities, collective memory [s]tudies and interfaith dialogue" (MCMD n.d.), as indicating that 42 percent of hate speech in Iraq comes from clerics (Al-Monitor 30 Dec. 2018). In an interview with the Research Directorate, a general coordinator of the MCMD stated that the situation "is getting better" and people are starting to reject hate speech from leaders using "minorit[ies] as scapegoat[s]" (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020). The same source provided an example of people refusing to follow fatwas from a Sunni and a Shia leader who ordered their followers to "prevent Christmas celebrations with Christians," and instead non-Christians celebrated Christmas with Christians (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020). Sources report that a ["prominent" (US 21 June 2019, 20)] Sunni cleric issued a fatwa directing Muslims to refrain from celebrating Christmas or New Years (Al-Monitor 30 Dec. 2018; US 21 June 2019, 20). The December 2018 article in Al-Monitor states that the fatwa set off "a wave of anger" from Iraqi Christians and "other Iraqi minorities, secular activists and even moderate Muslim clerics" (Al-Monitor 30 Dec. 2018). Sources report that the Iraqi government [and the KRG Sunni Endowments (US 21 June 2019, 20)] rejected the fatwa (US 21 June 2019, 20; Al-Monitor 30 Dec. 2018). The Al-Monitor article further indicates that a "prominent" cleric from Basra issued a counter-fatwa, calling on Muslims to attend Christmas celebrations (Al-Monitor 30 Dec. 2018).

2.1 Treatment by Authorities

2.1.1 Northern Iraq

Sources report that some government officials (US 10 June 2020, 2; AsiaNews 14 Feb. 2019) or Iranian-backed Shia PMFs (Kurdistan 24 5 Feb. 2018) are attempting to change the demographics in traditionally Christian areas in Ninewa (US 10 June 2020, 2; AsiaNews 14 Feb. 2019; Kurdistan 24 5 Feb. 2018). Sources state that Christians in Ninewa are harassed and assaulted by Shia PMFs to deter Christians from returning (AsiaNews 14 Feb. 2019; Kurdistan 24 5 Feb. 2018). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2018* cites Christian religious leaders as indicating that the Shabak [3] Shia militia 30th Brigade, controlled by an Iraqi parliament member and his brother, committed "harassment and sexual assaults" against Christian women in Bartalla and other areas of Hamdaniya District in Ninewa (US 21 June 2019, 10). The Associated Press (AP) cites a Catholic priest in Bartalla as indicating that there were "multiple cases of sexual harassment" reported and that, in one instance, Shabak men fired into the air by the town's church for more than an hour (AP 13 Feb. 2019). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* indicates that

Christians again reported abuse, harassment, and delays at numerous checkpoints operated by various PMF units, including the 30th Brigade in Qaraqosh, Bartalla, and Karamles, and the 50th "Babylon" Brigade in Batnaya and Tal Kayf, impeding movement in and around several Christian towns on the Ninewa Plain. Christians in Bartalla said

they felt threatened by the actions of the Shabak 30th Brigade, such as deploying forces in Christian areas, establishing its headquarters in the Christian sub-district of Bartalla, controlling the trade roads in the Ninewa Plain by establishing check points, forcing merchants to pay bribes, controlling real estate in Christian areas, and other forms of harassment of Christians and Sunni Arabs.

Christian religious leaders continued to publicly accuse the 30th Brigade of verbal harassment of Christians in Bartalla and elsewhere in Hamdaniya District of Ninewa. Members of the Christian community in Bartalla said activities of the 30th Brigade threatened their way of life and could change the area's demographics. (US 10 June 2020, 10)

In contrast, AP cites Qusay Abbas, the Shabak representative in the Iraqi Parliament, as stating that the "incidents of harassment against Christians are just individual acts that don't represent the community of Shabak or the militias" (AP 13 Feb. 2019). Sources report that the 30th Brigade refused to comply with government orders to leave checkpoints (US 10 June 2020, 10; Reuters 29 Aug. 2019).

2.1.2 KRG

Al Arabiya, a Dubai-based online news publication focusing on the Middle East (Al Arabiya n.d.), quotes an outreach director of ACN as indicating that "[t]he situation is very stable in Erbil, there is a sense of security and there seems to be a possibility for growth for Christians," but further adds that they "remain vulnerable" since Christians do not have their own militia or police force (Al Arabiya 23 Feb. 2020). The MERI report states that "Christians living in KRI, under the KRG, fared better than those in the disputed territories" (MERI Sept. 2017, 10). The same source further states that Christians in the KRI "were better protected by legal provisions and enjoyed equal business and employment opportunities. However, they had their grievances too," such as land ownership (MERI Sept. 2017, 10). The 2020 USCIRF report similarly indicates that

religious freedom conditions in KRG territory remained largely consistent relative to prior years, in that the Muslim majority and various religious minorities share reasonably free conditions relative to the rest of Iraq, despite some lingering issues such as the unresolved status of some Christian properties. (US 28 Apr. 2020, 73)

Sources report that [Assyrian (US May 2017, 38)] Christian land in the KRI [Erbil (MERI Sept. 2017, 10)] has been expropriated by the KRG for various purposes, including for personal financial gain (US May 2017, 38; MERI Sept. 2017, 10) or that "instances of illegal Kurdish construction on Assyrian-owned lands occur frequently" (MRG Nov. 2017a). A May 2017 report by USCIRF indicates that the KRG ordered the appropriations to end, while denying involvement (US May 2017, 38). The MERI report similarly states that the KRG had issued "official court and KRG rulings"; however, Christians report that they did not receive restitution (MERI Sept. 2017, 10).

2.1.3 Baghdad

Sources report that [Chaldean (MRG Nov. 2017b)] Christians who fled Baghdad had their houses appropriated and title documents changed (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020; MRG Nov. 2017b). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2018* cites media reports as stating that "political parties, criminal networks, and some militia groups seized more than 30,000 Christian properties in Baghdad, as well as areas of Anbar, Babil, Basrah, Diyala and Wasit with impunity, despite pledges by the prime minister's office to open investigations into the seizures" (US 21 June 2019, 20). The MCMD General Coordinator indicated that "corrupt government officials" were responsible for changing the title documents, and members of the militia were responsible for appropriating the houses (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020). The same source further stated that while Christian houses were "easier" targets since the owners fled, this also happened to non-Christians (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020). Without providing further details, Agenzia Fides, the news agency of the Vatican focusing on missionary work (Agenzia Fides n.d.), reports that the criminal court of Karaada, a district in Baghdad, took "measures" against two government officials who gave false property documents to "impostors and organized groups of swindlers" to sell houses belonging to Christians (Agenzia Fides 17 May 2017).

3. State Protection

3.1 Iraq

Article 2 of Iraq's Constitution provides the following:

First: Islam is the official religion of the State and is a foundation source of legislation:

...

Second: This Constitution guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabians. (Iraq 2005)

Sources report that the following religious groups are registered with the Iraqi government, as they are recognized by Iraq's personal status law: Muslim, Chaldean, Assyrian, Assyrian Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, Roman Catholic, National Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical Protestant Assyrian, Seventh-day Adventist, Coptic Orthodox, Yazidi, Sabeian-Mandaean and Jewish (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.34; US 10 June 2020, 5). The same sources indicate that recognized religious groups can "appoint legal representatives and perform legal transactions," such as buying and selling property (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.34; US 10 June 2020, 5). Sources state that there are three *diwans* or governing bodies responsible for

administering matters for recognized religious groups, including the Endowment of the Christian, Yazidi, and Sabean-Mandean Religions Diwan; the diwans distribute government funds to "maintain and protect" religious facilities (US 10 June 2020, 6; Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.35). Without providing further details, the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* indicates that the KRG and Iraqi central government provided "increased protection" to Christian churches during Easter and Christmas (US 10 June 2020, 14). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* indicates that the government provides Christian religious education in public schools in areas with "concentrations of Christian populations" (US 10 June 2020, 8). The same source further states that Christian religious education is part of the curriculum in "at least" 255 public schools, of which 55 are located in the KRI and that the KRG Ministry of Education provides funding for religious instruction in schools for Muslim and Christian students (US 10 June 2020, 14, 15). Australia's DFAT reports that Christian religious education is part of the curriculum in "at least" 150 public schools in Baghdad, Ninewah and Kirkuk (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.38).

Australia's DFAT indicates that most PMFs are Shia Arab units operating across Iraq, while Sunni Arab, Yazidi, Christian and other minority PMFs operate in or near their home region (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 5.8). The Danish and Norwegian FFM report states that whether an IDP can return depends "largely" on which militia controls the area, meaning that "Christians want a Christian militia to protect them" and further cites Kirkuk Now, an Iraq-based online news publication, as indicating that the "Christian areas of Ninewa are considered relatively calm" and the local population have their own Christian militias (Denmark and Norway Nov. 2018, 28, 72). The MCMD General Coordinator stated that there are five militias belonging to Christian leaders, but in order to coordinate their "function and salary," the militias "must coordinate with big political parties," leading to some Christian militias controlled by Iran-backed Shia militias and others controlled by Kurdish political parties; the militias are "not neutral" and they get drawn into the struggle for strategic land between the Iraqi government and the KRG, forcing Christians to choose a side (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020). A joint report by the Institute for International Law and Human Rights (IILHR), a non-profit charity working with Iraqi leaders to strengthen approaches to human rights issues, MRG and two other organizations, similarly indicates that the "limited strength" of minority militias means that they require support from the Iraqi government and security forces or from the KRG and Peshmerga [the KRG's military force (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 5.17)], which leads to "allegations of political manipulation" (IILHR, et al. 7 June 2017, 63, 20). Sources report that there are Christian militias [Ninewa Protection Unit (IILHR, et al. 7 June 2017, 20)] affiliated with the Iraqi government and that the Christian Ninewa Protection Force is affiliated with the KRG (IILHR, et al. 7 June 2017, 20; Al-Monitor 15 Sept. 2017).

3.2 KRG

Sources report that the Kurdistan Region Law (5) of 2015, known as the Protection of the Rights of the Components of Iraqi Kurdistan Law [Law of Protecting the Rights of Components in Kurdistan (US May 2017, 9)] protects the rights of all "components" of the KRI, or national and religious groups, including Christians (US May 2017, 9; UN 30 Nov. 2018). Law (5) of 2015, as reproduced in English by the Peace and Freedom Organization in Kurdistan [4] and Al-Mesalla Organization for Human Resources Development (Al-Mesalla) [5], provides the following:

Article three: The authorities of Kurdistan Region – Iraq guarantees efficient and full equality to components.

First: the government provides equality and equal opportunity in political, cultural, social and economic life to components through law and effective policy for all individuals of any component, and participate them [*sic*] in all other decisions that are related to them.

Second: all types of discrimination against all components in Kurdistan are prevented; a violator will be punished by the applicable laws.

...

Fifth: Resolving implemented encroachments in component's areas and to recover and return to the status of their places before the encroachment and transcendence happened, and ending all consequences and legacies that lead to change in population and demography, and compensation in a case of difficult situation to return to their original place. (KRG 2015)

The MERI report indicates that Law No. 5 of 2015 addresses appropriated Christian land; however, it is "yet to be enforced" (MERI Sept. 2017, 11). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that Christianity is one of the eight faiths registered with the KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs (MERA) (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.36; US 10 June 2020, 6). Australia's DFAT states that the KRG recognized eleven evangelical and other Protestant denominations, in addition to those recognized by the Iraqi central government (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 3.48). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* indicates that the KRG MERA is responsible for endowments that pay the salaries of clergy and fund development and maintenance of religious sites for Muslims, Christians and Yazidis (US 10 June 2020, 6). Australia's DFAT similarly reports that registration with the Council of Iraqi Christian Church Leaders, an

independent group created by Christian leaders, grants access to the KRG MERA and its endowment (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 2.48). The May 2017 USCIRF report states that the KRG "makes special efforts to provide for Christians," including providing funds to build churches and the development of Ainkawa (US May 2017, 17).

The MCMD General Coordinator indicated that the KRG gives Christians "some scope of freedom," which encouraged Christians to go to the KRI; the source provided the example of Christians being able to pass through security check points when traveling into Erbil by land (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020). The Danish and Norwegian FFM report cites an international NGO operating in the KRI as similarly indicating that IDPs need to go through a security screening at border checkpoints between Erbil and Iraq, but Kurds and Christians are exempt from screening (Denmark and Norway Nov. 2018, 37). In correspondence with EASO, a civilian rights officer of MRG indicated that "[t]he KRG imposes different entry requirements that can vary according to a person's ethnic and religious identity, or perceived political affiliations," "with entry generally being easier for Christians and Yezidis than for Shabak and Turkmen, for example" (EU Feb. 2019, 35). The Danish and Norwegian FFM report cites an international organization operating in the KRI assisting refugees and IDPs as reporting that a sponsorship requirement to apply for residency in the KRI applies to Christians and the Christian church which "would reportedly often" act as the sponsor (Denmark and Norway Nov. 2018, 101). The same source cites the IOM as indicating that a sponsor is required for a long term residence permit for the KRI and Christian IDPs are "not asked to provide a sponsor other than the Church that will act as a sponsor for them" (Denmark and Norway Nov. 2018, 87).

EASO quotes the MRG civilian rights officer as indicating that

"KRG officials regularly condition good treatment and access to services on support for the main Kurdish political parties. This affects even religious minorities that the KRG has allowed into the region in large numbers, such as Christians and Yezidis. For example, Christians have been prevented from entering the KRG during times when Christian-led protests were planned." (EU Feb. 2019, 35)

The May 2017 USCIRF report states that in April 2016, Kurdish security forces blocked Christians, who were travelling to Erbil to protest land appropriation, from crossing checkpoints (US May 2017, 17).

4. Support Programs

The MCMD General Coordinator indicated that the Ministry of Displacement and Migration provides temporary payment to IDPs, but the problem is "bigger than the ability of the government" and that there is "no specific policy" to deal with this crisis and the "only thing they can do is to give money" (General Coordinator 10 Sept. 2020). A report by a UN Special Rapporteur following his visit to Iraq from 9 to 15 May 2015 states that the Iraqi government provides an initial cash payment of US\$700 to internally displaced households, which is "sufficient to cover basic needs including shelter, food and essential items for only a few weeks" (UN 5 Apr. 2016, para. 28).

Sources report that Law No. 20 of 2009 provides compensation to any Iraqi citizen who suffered losses from wars (Ceasefire and MRG Jan. 2020, 12) or "military operations or terrorist actions" (UN 13 May 2020, para. 15), ranging from death, missing persons, kidnapping, injuries, property damages, impact to employment and education [and disabilities (Ceasefire and MRG Jan. 2020, 12)] (Ceasefire and MRG Jan. 2020, 12; UN 13 May 2020, para. 15). A report by Ceasefire and MRG on reparations for Iraqis impacted by ISIS indicates that compensation is "a complex administrative journey," requiring "numerous types of administrative proof" and the payment of several fees that can prevent some families from accessing any compensation (Ceasefire and MRG Jan. 2020, 17). The same report cites a resident of the Christian-majority city of Hamdaniya as reporting that applications for compensations cannot be filed as the property registration office is closed (Ceasefire and MRG Jan. 2020, 17). Without providing further details, a UN special rapporteur who visited Iraq from 15 to 23 February 2020 indicates that the Iraqi government needs to address "a number of shortcomings" related to the compensation scheme (UN 13 May 2020, para. 16).

The February 2019 IOM survey found the following regarding Christian IDP respondents who were receiving assistance:

- 8.5 percent were receiving food assistance;
- 9 percent were receiving shelter assistance;
- 7 percent were receiving cash payments;
- 7 percent were receiving non-food items assistance;
- 26 percent were receiving health services;
- 27.5 percent were receiving education services;
- 40 percent were receiving "protection" services; and
- 33 percent were receiving water, sanitation and hygiene services (UN Feb. 2019, 14).

4.1 Non-Government Support Programs

The May 2017 USCIRF report indicates that Christian IDPs in the KRG receive "better care than many others" due to the support from local and international churches (US May 2017, 17). A survey on humanitarian assistance in Mosul conducted by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), researchers and communications professionals working on humanitarian issues, of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), an independent global think tank (ODI n.d.),

cites its interviews with representatives of the international aid sector as indicating that local NGOs and religious institutions provide financial relief, particularly for minority religious groups such as Christians (ODI July 2019, 2, 15, 28). The same survey, based on surveys with 300 households in Mosul and 36 interviews with individuals receiving assistance, found that among IDP respondents, 12 percent reported receiving aid from the government, 10 percent received aid from religious endowments and "[o]nly a handful" reported receiving aid from "other sources" (ODI July 2019, 14-15).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights (Ceasefire) is an "international initiative to develop civilian-led monitoring of violations of international humanitarian law or human rights; to secure accountability and reparation for those violations; and to develop the practice of civilian rights" (Ceasefire n.d.).

[2] Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) describes the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs) as a "state-sponsored umbrella military organisation composed of approximately 60 militia groups operating nationwide" and were recognized as "an official force" by the Iraqi parliament in November 2016 (Australia 17 Aug. 2020, para. 5.8-5.9).

[3] The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* indicates that three quarters of the Shabak population is Shia, and that most Sunni and Shia Shabak reside in Ninewa (US 10 June 2020, 4).

[4] The Peace and Freedom Organization in Kurdistan is an Erbil-based NGO working to promote "peaceful co-existence through promoting trust and collaboration between the diverse components of the society" (Peace Insight n.d.).

[5] Al-Mesalla Organization for Human Resources Development (Al-Mesalla) is an Erbil-based NGO working to support human rights, to stabilize democracy and conflict resolution and to reinforce volunteer work (Al-Mesalla n.d.).

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