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July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report - Iraq

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
September 13, 2011

[Covers six-month period from 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010 (USDOS is shifting to a calendar year reporting period)]

The constitution provides for religious freedom and the practice of religious rights. The constitution recognizes Islam as the official religion, mandates that Islam be considered a source of legislation, and states that no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam. It also states that no law may be enacted that contradicts principles of democracy or the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in the constitution. Apparent contradictions between the constitution and other legal provisions have not been tested in court and make unclear the full legal protection for religious freedom. Moreover, the constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The government continued to respect the right of citizens to practice their religion. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. The government continued to call for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities. For example on November 24, 2010, the Council of Representatives approved a document calling on the government to protect the country's Christians. Political leaders around the country in all levels of government strongly condemned the October 31 attack against the Sayidat al-Najat Church, as did religious leaders of all faiths and sects. The prime minister committed the government to funding the church's refurbishment and providing long-term extra security for all churches. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) declared its region a temporary safe haven for Christians who wanted to escape the insecurity in Baghdad.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Sectarian violence in some parts of the country had a negative impact on the ability of all religious believers to practice their faith, although to a lesser extent in the Kurdistan region. Violence against adherents of various religious groups resulted in approximately 275 deaths, over 750 injuries, significant internal displacement, some external displacement as refugees, and restricted religious freedom. The overwhelming majority of mass casualty attacks targeted Muslims. In addition to targeted attacks, a combination of sectarian hiring practices, corruption, and the overall lack of rule of law had a detrimental economic effect on the minority non-Muslim communities that do not control access to public sector employment and also contributed to the departure of significant numbers of non-Muslims from the

country.

Senior U.S. officials called for unity in the face of sectarian violence, pressed for greater inclusion of religious minorities in the political process and advocated for nonsectarian hiring practices. The ambassador and other senior U.S. government officials; officials of provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), the embassy, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); and members of the U.S. military worked to address religious minority concerns with local and national government officials. Embassy, PRT, and U.S. military officers engaged with Iraq's Shia, Sunni, Kurd, and religious minority populations; issued statements urging better mutual understanding; and funded grants and projects that support religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

Due to violence, internal migration, and lack of governmental capacity, religious demography statistics varied. Numbers are often estimates from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than census data or other official sources. The government passed a census law in 2008, which will allow a nationwide census to be conducted in the future.

The country has an area of 168,754 square miles and a population of 28.9 million. According to statistics provided by the government, 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Shia Muslims – predominantly Arabs but also Turkmen, Farsi (Shia) Kurds, and other groups – constitute a 60 to 65 percent majority. Arab and Kurdish Sunni Muslims make up 32 to 37 percent of the population – 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 16 percent are Sunni Arabs, and the remaining 1 to 2 percent are Sunni Turkmen. Approximately 3 percent of the population is composed of Christians, Yezidis, Sabeans-Mandaeans, Bahais, Shabaks, Kaka'is (sometimes referred to as Ahl-e Haqq), and a very small number of Jews. Shia, although predominantly located in the south and east, are also a majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the west, center, and the north of the country.

Reported estimates from leaders of the Christian population in 2003 ranged from 800,000 to 1.4 million. Current population estimates by Christian leaders range from 400,000 to 600,000. Approximately two-thirds of Christians are Chaldeans (an eastern rite of the Catholic Church), nearly one-fifth are Assyrians (Church of the East), and the remainder are Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenians (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), Anglicans, and other Protestants. Most Assyrian Christians are in the north, and most Syriac Christians are split among the Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Ninewa Provinces. Christian leaders estimated that as much as 50 percent of the country's Christian population lives in Baghdad, and 30 to 40 percent lives in the north, with the largest Christian communities located in and around Mosul, Erbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk. The archbishop of the Armenian Orthodox Diocese reported that 15,000 to 16,000 Armenian Christians remained in the country, primarily in the cities of Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk, and Mosul. Evangelical Christians reportedly number between 5,000 and 6,000. They can be found in the northern part of the country, as well as in Baghdad, with a small number residing in Basrah.

Yezidi leaders reported that most of the country's 500,000 to 600,000 Yezidis reside in the north, with 15 percent in Dohuk Province and the rest in Ninewa Province. Shabak leaders stated there are 400,000 to 500,000 Shabaks, who reside mainly in the north, near Mosul. Estimates of the size of the Sabean-Mandaean community vary widely; according to Sabean-Mandaean leaders, 3,500 to 7,000 remained in the country, reduced from an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 in 2003. The Bahai leadership reported their members number fewer than 2,000 and are spread throughout the country in small groups. Eight Jews reside in Baghdad, and none are known to live in other parts of the country.

Spurred by the October 31 attack against the Sayidat al-Najat Church, the rate of Christian displacement was greater than in the previous reporting period. Between November 1 and December 7, over 800 families fled violence against Christians in

Baghdad and Mosul; approximately 175 families fled to Erbil; and over 400 families fled to the Ninewa plains. On December 9 the Ministry of Displacement and Migration announced that it had distributed aid to 138 Christian families, and on December 7 the Directorate of Migration and Displacement in Dohuk Province reported 84 Christian families displaced from Baghdad and Ninewa had relocated to the province. Due to attacks and threats against Christians in Baghdad, Mosul, and other cities, approximately 1,400 Christian families relocated to the KRG and Ninewa Plains by year's end. The number of Christians displaced may be higher since many displaced Christians stayed with family, relatives, and friends in those areas. Some Christian families sought refuge in Kirkuk province. Additional press reports noted that Christians also fled to Jordan and Turkey, hoping to ultimately emigrate to Europe or North America.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution provides for freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice for all citizens and declares all Iraqis equal before the law without discrimination based on religion, sect, or belief. Apparent contradictions between the constitution and other legal provisions have not been tested in court and make unclear the full legal protection for religious freedom. Government regulations preventing the conversion of Muslims to other faiths, a law that forcibly converts minor children to Islam if either parent converts to Islam, laws and resolutions that outlaw the practice of some faiths, and a law that overrides religious tenets of individuals adhering to non-Muslim faiths with Islamic law principles remain. However, these regulations were not tested in court. In practice the constitution has served as the framework through which the government provided protection for religious freedom during the reporting period.

The country's civil and penal codes remain silent regarding legal remedies or penalties for conversion from Islam. In practice government institutions do not acknowledge conversion from Islam for official purposes, and persons who leave Islam often face severe social persecution, including death, often by assailants known to the victims. The penal code mandates that criminal penalties can only be imposed by penal law.

A 1972 law still in effect makes conversion of minor children to Islam automatic if either parent converts to Islam. Despite the Higher Judicial Council's determination that the law remained valid, during the reporting period the Ministry of Human Rights advocated for its removal.

Law No. 105 of 1970 prohibits the practice of the Bahai Faith, and a 2001 resolution prohibits the practice of the Wahhabi branch of Islam. Although provisions on freedom of religion in the constitution may supersede these laws, no court challenges have been brought to have them invalidated, and no legislation has been proposed to repeal them.

There are instances in which the 1959 Personal Status Law based on Sharia (Islamic law) principles applies to non-Muslims, thereby overriding religious tenets of individuals adhering to non-Muslim faiths. While article 41 of the constitution provides that citizens are free in their commitments to their personal status according to their religious groups, sects, beliefs, or choices, it requires implementing legislation that has not yet been enacted. Meanwhile, the 1959 Personal Status Law (Law 188) remains in force, which calls for the adjudication of cases in accordance with Sharia principles in the absence of applicable legislative text and applies to all Iraqis unless they are exempted by virtue of a special law. "Special law" might also include foreigners, such as the British Proclamation No. 6 of 1917 and the Personal Status Law of Foreigners, No. 38, of 1931. Proclamation No. 6 provides that the civil courts consult the religious authority of the non-Muslim parties for their opinion under the applicable religious law and apply this opinion in court. The Personal Status Law of Foreigners also requires that courts apply

the municipal law of the foreign litigants in the resolution of their domestic law matters. Despite this exception there are cases in which this law overrides the religious tenets of individuals adhering to non-Muslim faiths. For example, the law forbids the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man. These provisions could be considered inconsistent with article 14 of the constitution, which guarantees equal protection under the law without discrimination based on gender or religion. No court has yet ruled on this issue.

The constitution stipulates that Islam is the official religion of the state and a foundation source of legislation. It states that no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam. It also states that no law may be enacted that contradicts principles of democracy or the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in the constitution. The constitution stipulates that the state shall guarantee freedom of worship and protection of places of worship. Iraqi security forces and police provided protection for places of worship.

The constitution establishes the government's commitment to assuring and maintaining the sanctity of holy shrines and religious sites and guaranteeing the free practice of rituals. The penal code criminalizes disrupting or impeding religious ceremonies and desecrating religious buildings, and specifies that it applies to religious minorities. Followers of all religious groups and sects are free in the practice of religious rites and in the management of religious endowments, their affairs, and their religious institutions.

Similar to previous Iraqi governments, the government considers Jewish Iraqi citizens who emigrated from Iraq following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and in the following decades as having renounced their Iraqi citizenship and the possibility of its reinstatement. Iraq's criminal code 201 stipulates that any person promoting Zionist principles, or who associates himself with Zionist organizations or assists them by giving material or moral support, or works in any way towards the realization of Zionist objectives, is subject to punishment by death.

Although individuals from minority groups hold senior positions in the national parliament and central government, as well as in the KRG, minorities are proportionally underrepresented in the unelected government workforce, particularly at the provincial and local levels. The Government of Iraq and the KRG continued to provide political representation and support to minority communities during the reporting period. Iraq formed a new government during the reporting period. Until December 2010 the Iraqi Council of Ministers (COM) included two Christian ministers (for human rights and industry and minerals) and one Yezidi, as minister of state for civil society affairs. In December 2010 one member of a minority was appointed to the COM. The Kurdistan Region Council of Ministers includes two Christian ministers (for finance and civil society) and two ministers without portfolios who are prominent Yezidis.

The KRG provided some services, including payment of salaries for Yezidi religious instruction at certain state-funded schools.

At the end of the reporting period, national identity cards continued to denote the holder's religion, which has been used as a basis for discrimination; however, passports did not indicate the holder's religion.

Religious groups are required to register with the government. To register a group must have a minimum of 500 adherents in the country and if Christian, receive approval from the Council of Iraqi Christian Church Leaders, a quasi-governmental group consisting of representatives from each of the 14 officially recognized churches.

In April 2007 the Ministry of Interior's Nationality and Passport Section canceled regulation 358 of 1975, which prohibited the issuance of national identity cards to those claiming the Bahai Faith. In May 2007 a small number of Bahais were issued identity cards. The Nationality and Passport Section's legal advisor stopped issuance of the cards thereafter, claiming Bahais had been registered as Muslims since 1975 and citing a

government regulation preventing the conversion of "Muslims" to another faith. Without this official identity card, Bahais cannot register their children for school or acquire passports. Despite the cancellation of the regulation, Bahais whose identity records were changed to "Muslim" after regulation 358 was instituted in 1975 still could not change their identity cards to indicate their Bahai faith, and their children were not recognized as Bahais.

The government maintains three waqfs (religious endowments): the Sunni, the Shia, and the Christian and Other Religions Endowments. The endowments, which operate under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, receive government funding to maintain and protect religious facilities.

The KRG, through the Kurdistan Region Ministry of the Endowment, pays the salaries of imams and funds the construction and maintenance of mosques. This funding is available for Christian religious establishments, but many churches prefer to be self-funded.

Article 92 of the constitution provides that the Federal Supreme Court shall be made up of a number of judges, experts in Islamic jurisprudence, and legal scholars. At the end of the reporting period, no legislation had been enacted to regulate the number or method of selection of judges, or the work of the court, leaving unsettled the question of whether Islamic jurisprudence experts would serve as consultants and advisors to the judges or as members of the court.

The government provides significant support for Muslims desiring to perform the Hajj, organizing travel routes and assisting pilgrims with obtaining immunization documents for entry into Saudi Arabia. The government also provides funding to Sunni and Shia waqfs, which accept Hajj applications from the public and submit them to the Supreme Council for the Hajj. The council, which is attached to the Prime Minister's Office, organizes a lottery process that selects pilgrims for official Hajj visas.

The government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools. While non-Muslim students are not required to participate, some non-Muslim students reported that they felt pressure to do so. Arabic language instruction, which often uses the Qur'an as a primary text, is required for all students regardless of faith. In most areas of the country, the curriculum of both primary and secondary public schools includes three class periods per week of Islamic education, including study of the Qur'an, as a requirement for graduation. Private schools, such as Al-A'raf Elementary School and the Al-Massara School for Girls, both run by the Eastern Orthodox Church, operate in the country. To operate legally private schools must obtain a license from the director general of private and public schools and pay annual fees. The Kurdistan Region Ministry of Education funds Aramaic-language public schools (elementary and high school) in its territory, and the syllabus does not contain religion or Qur'an studies.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Ashura, Arbai'n, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad), and Christmas. Although Easter is not a national holiday, government policy recognizes Christians' right to observe it, and Christian groups reported that they were able to observe the Easter holiday without interference.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government continued to respect the right of the vast majority of citizens to practice their religion. The government reaffirmed its respect for religious freedom on numerous occasions throughout the reporting period. Sectarian misappropriation of official authority, which impeded the right of citizens to worship freely in some cases – as sometimes reported in land disputes and in educational and cultural issues – continued to be a significant concern.

Although a few individuals from minority communities held senior positions in the government, there were reports of religiously based employment discrimination in which ministries hired and showed favoritism toward individuals who shared the minister's

religious persuasion. The effects of sectarian hiring were especially severe in the security and police forces, where non-Muslim personnel were practically non-existent. On June 2, 2010, an Iraqi court heard the first court case alleging unlawful dismissal from employment due to religious and ethnic discrimination. The plaintiff, an Armenian Christian, alleged that the defendant, a senior government official, dismissed him from his job out of a desire to hire an Arab Sunni for the position. The judge found for the defendant, citing a lack of evidence and lack of witness testimony. The plaintiff's appeals, which had scheduled hearings in September and October, were postponed.

Several evangelical churches complained that they had been unable to obtain official registration from the government and that registration conditions were too onerous, including the requirement of at least 500 members in the congregation.

During the reporting period, there were some schools and other public places where non-Muslim minorities and secular Arabs reported that they felt obliged to adhere to certain Islamic practices. Such practices included women wearing the hijab (Islamic headscarf) or non-Muslim and secular populations participating in fasting during Ramadan.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom in the country. The government carried out few investigations of alleged sectarian-based crimes; arrests following murder or other crimes were rare during the reporting period.

There were allegations that the KRG engaged in discriminatory behavior against religious minorities. Christians and Yezidis living north of Mosul claimed that the KRG confiscated their property without compensation and that it began building settlements on their land. There were reports that Yezidis faced restrictions when entering the KRG and had to obtain KRG approval to find jobs in areas within the KRG-administered Ninewa Province, or under the security protection of the Peshmerga (Kurdish armed forces).

Shabak and some Yezidi political leaders alleged that Kurdish Peshmerga forces regularly harassed and committed abuses against their communities in Ninewa Province. For example minority leaders reported that Kurdish forces intimidated minority communities to identify themselves as Kurds and support their inclusion in the KRG. Some Yezidi political representatives also reported that because of their religious affiliation, they were not allowed to pass through security checkpoints in areas controlled by Kurdish Peshmerga as they traveled from Baghdad to their communities in the northern part of the country.

The KRG denied allegations that it was behind violent incidents directed at Christians and other minorities. Moreover, despite such allegations, many non-Muslims reside in the north and the KRG area where some sought refuge from the insecurity and intolerance in other parts of the country.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

Terrorists and insurgents continue to victimize citizens of all ethnicities and religious groups. Terrorists commit acts of harassment, intimidation, robbery, kidnapping, and murder.

On October 31 five terrorists, including two suicide bombers, attacked the Sayidat al-Najat (Our Lady of Salvation) Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad's Karrada District. The attackers immediately killed a number of persons upon entry into the church and held appropriately 100 persons hostage. The suicide bombers detonated their explosives among a group of worshippers when the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) initiated a rescue operation; the ISF killed the remaining gunmen. The attackers killed two priests, 44 worshippers, and seven ISF members. More than 80 persons were injured. The Islamic

State of Iraq, a terrorist group affiliated with al-Qaeda in Iraq, claimed responsibility for the attack. By the end of November, the Ministry of Interior arrested 12 persons allegedly responsible for planning the attack. At year's end all those arrested remained in custody.

Attacks on many mosques, churches, and other holy sites rendered some of them unusable. During most of the reporting period, many worshippers reportedly did not attend religious services or participate in religious events because of the threat of violence. Some Christians held muted Christmas celebrations as a result of the October 31 terrorist attack on Sayidat al-Najat Syriac Catholic Church. In December the Basrah Christian community decided to limit its Christmas celebrations to church services and contribute to the funeral processions of Shiite shrines.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In mid-December the ISF deployed 50,000 soldiers and policemen to Karbala and Najaf to protect the nearly one million religious pilgrims who traveled to the cities to commemorate the Shiite religious holiday of Ashura.

Media reported that on December 10, most of the religious leaders during Friday prayers at mosques in the Kurdistan Region identified helping Christians as a religious duty and asked their worshippers to help displaced Christian families in the region as much as they could. The KRG's Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs encouraged and coordinated the dissemination of the message.

On November 30 and December 1, the Ministry of Human Rights and the KRG's Ministry of Youth and Sport held a Minorities Conference for Coexistence and Social Tolerance in Erbil, during which members of diverse religious faiths and ethnicities discussed concrete ways to combat intolerance and promote peaceful coexistence.

On November 25 Ninewa Governor Athil al-Nujaifi announced that although the government security forces were primarily responsible for protecting Christians, the Iraqi government would grant a permit to carry a firearm for protection to every Christian family that applied for one. At a November 26 meeting in Erbil, however, nine Christian political parties voiced their opposition to forming armed militias to defend themselves, noting that provision of citizen security was a core function of any government.

Political leaders around the country in all levels of government strongly condemned the October 31 attack against the Sayidat al-Najat Church. The Prime Minister committed the government to funding the church's refurbishment and providing extra security for all churches. On November 24 the Council of Representatives approved a 10-point document calling on the government to protect Iraqi Christians. The government accepted the points in the document that did not have budget implications, for example allowing threatened Christians to transfer government benefits to different provinces, monitoring for extremists messages, and continuing public statements promoting religious tolerance. The KRG declared its region a temporary safe haven for Christians who wanted to escape the insecurity in Baghdad.

On September 25 Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani met with Yazidi Prince Tahseen Bak and the Yazidi Spiritual Council in Salah al-Din. Barzani stressed the importance of preserving the Yazidi religious practices and nationality.

On September 11 the Kirkuk Police Department implemented additional security measures for churches in Kirkuk to pre-empt any attacks in response to the announced plans of an American pastor to burn copies of the Qu'ran on the anniversary of the September 11 attacks in the United States.

During early July the government provided extra security measures for Shiite pilgrims visiting Baghdad during a major religious festival. These measures included deploying

thousands of extra troops, imposing traffic bans that included bicycles and motorcycles, and establishing additional checkpoints.

The government continued to fund the Directorate for non-Muslim Endowments, which used the funds to renovate and protect minority religious sites. According to press reports, the government launched a project in 2009 to renovate the interior of the Shrine of Ezekiel, a prominent Jewish heritage site that Christians and Muslims also revere.

During the reporting period, government leaders spoke of the need for all citizens to unite – regardless of religious orientation – to confront terrorism. The government publicly denounced incidents of sectarian violence and repeatedly encouraged unity among the country's religious sects. Government leaders often emphasized their commitment to equal treatment for all religious groups and ethnicities.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Sectarian violence in many parts of the country had a negative impact on the ability of all religious believers to practice their faith, although to a lesser extent in the Kurdistan region. Conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert pressure on society to conform to their interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although these efforts affected all citizens, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to this pressure and violence because of their minority status and lack of protection provided by a tribal structure. For example Sabeen-Mandaeans, who are few in number and live in small groups spread across the country, continued to report that they were targeted by Islamic militias.

Many individuals from all ethnicities and religious groups were targeted because of their religious identity. Acts committed against them included harassment, intimidation, robbery, kidnapping, and murder. The overall magnitude of sectarian violence declined during the reporting period. The overwhelming majority of the mass-casualty attacks targeted the Shia population.

Sunni Muslims continued to claim general discrimination during the reporting period, alleging an ongoing campaign of revenge by the Shia majority in retribution for the Sunnis' presumed favored status and abuses of Shia under the former regime. Sunni Muslims also claim to suffer discrimination because of the public's perception that the majority of the Sunni population sympathized with Sunni extremists and former regime elements.

In general minorities were underrepresented in elected positions, government appointments, and in public sector jobs. This situation was especially acute at the provincial level, where minorities lacked full representation in the provincial councils. This underrepresentation limited their access to government-provided security and economic development. Non-Muslims, particularly Christians and Yezidis, complained of being politically isolated by the Muslim majority because of their religious differences.

The combination of discriminatory hiring practices by members of the majority Muslim population, attacks against non-Muslim businesses, corruption, and the overall lack of rule of law also had a detrimental economic effect on the non-Muslim communities and contributed to the departure of significant numbers of non-Muslims from the country.

Shia in Sunni-dominated neighborhoods, Sunnis in Shia-dominated neighborhoods, and religious minorities in both Sunni- and Shia-dominated neighborhoods reported receiving anonymous death threat letters demanding that they leave their homes, and in many cases individuals either complied or were killed. These incidents continued to occur at lower levels than during the last reporting period.

Some Muslims threatened women and girls, regardless of their religious affiliation, for

refusing to wear the hijab, for dressing in Western-style clothing, or for failing to adhere to strict interpretations of Islamic norms governing public behavior. Numerous women, including Christians, reported opting to wear the hijab for security purposes after being harassed for not doing so.

During the reporting period, Sabeian-Mandaean leaders reported that their community continued to be the target of violent attacks, although with less frequency than in the previous reporting period. In addition to being pressured to convert, they reported kidnappings with victims often held for ransom. In some cases ransom was paid; however, among those cases a few victims were released, while others were killed or remained missing. Women were also pressured to wear the hijab and to marry non-Sabeian-Mandaean men. Sabeian-Mandaeans reported that their gold and jewelry stores, representing their traditional occupation, have been burglarized and robbed.

During the reporting period, Yezidi and Shabak leaders reported that their communities also continued to be targets of harassment and violence. For example Yezidis in Baghdad who own legal, licensed liquor stores were targets of attack.

Throughout the reporting period, Muslim religious leaders (both Sunni and Shia), pilgrims, and religious congregants at shrines, places of worship, and private homes suffered fatal attacks and injuries.

On July 14 Sunni extremists attacked the leader of a Muslim mystic order and the Kaznazani Sufi shrine in Amariyah, killing four of the leader's family members and injuring six others, including the shrine's leader.

On July 22 gunmen killed Sheikh Fathi Ezzeddin al-Noaimi, the Sunni imam of the al-Salam Mosque in Mosul.

On August 15 gunmen opened fire on Sunni worshippers leaving a predawn service at the Abid Wais Mosque in Jurf-al-Sakhr, killing three individuals and injuring two others.

On September 9 attackers killed Sheikh Abd al-Jabbar Falih al-Jurburi, the Sansal Mosque's imam in al-Muqdadiah. The attackers beheaded and set ablaze the Sunni leader who had returned to his home three months prior to the attack, after fleeing due to threats against him because of his support for ex-insurgents.

On December 4 two separate blasts in Baghdad killed seven Iranian Shiite pilgrims; explosives near a popular rest stop for pilgrims killed five persons and injured 18 others; and a suicide car bomber who detonated his explosives after ramming a pilgrimage bus killed two Iranian pilgrims, injured 28 others, and injured nine Iraqis. Also on December 4, a car bomb exploded in a Shiite shopping area in Baghdad, killing six persons and injuring 42 individuals. There were four additional bomb attacks in predominantly Shiite areas in Baghdad on the same day, resulting in one fatality and 15 injured.

During the reporting period, there were at least 26 reported incidents against Muslims, which resulted in the deaths of at least 205 persons, and injuries to at least 716 others.

Throughout the reporting period, Christians in Baghdad received anonymous letters threatening their lives and indicating that they should permanently leave the country. Religious intolerance was a motivation for some letters, but some reports from Christian and Muslim sources also noted the possibility of economic reasons for the threats, specifically from persons trying to acquire Christian-owned property at sharply reduced prices.

Similar to Muslims, Christian leaders and congregants at places of worship and private homes suffered fatal attacks and injuries. In addition to the terrorist attack in which over 50 parishioners were killed at the Sayidat al-Najat Church, during the reporting period 12 Christians were killed and an unknown number injured in 10 separate incidents in Baghdad and other population centers.

In response to the Sayidat al-Najat Church incident and subsequent attacks against Christians, Iraqi Christians – joined by Muslim supporters – demonstrated and protested. The incident at the Sayidat al-Najat Church garnered widespread media coverage featuring reports on the general plight of Christians in Iraq. Media coverage on Iraqi Christians continued well into December. On December 4 sixteen representatives of Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac Christian communities, including some religious leaders, issued a declaration calling for the establishment of a province for minorities. However, other Christian community leaders voiced concern and did not support the initiative.

Although their actions often are unreported, Muslim neighbors sometimes try to assist Christians. For example on November 22 gunmen killed two Syriac Catholic Christian brothers in their auto mechanic workshop in Mosul. Mosul police also found an elderly Christian woman strangled in her home on the same day. Another media source reported that Muslim neighbors through their intervention prevented an attack on another Christian family in Mosul's al-Bakr District on November 22. Muslim security forces routinely face danger in their efforts to protect minority populations.

Shopkeepers were targeted for providing goods or services considered to be inconsistent with Islam and sometimes were subjected to violence for failing to comply with warnings to stop such activity. Liquor store owners, primarily Christians and Yezidis, were especially targeted. On October 9 a bomb exploded at a liquor store in central Baghdad, which damaged the store, but caused no casualties. There were numerous reports in December of legal, licensed liquor stores owned by non-Muslims in Baghdad facing harassment and violent attacks.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government is committed to promoting religious freedom and continues to work closely with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials from the Department of State, the armed forces, the embassy, and PRTs met regularly with representatives of all of the country's religious and ethnic communities, including its minority communities, and maintained an active dialogue.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs for Iraq Michael Corbin serves as the State Department's special coordinator for the country's religious and ethnic minority communities. During the reporting period, the special coordinator visited minority refugee populations in the United States to discuss the political, economic, and security challenges facing these communities. Assistant Chief of Mission for Assistance Transition, Ambassador Peter Bodde, leads the embassy's efforts to reach out to the minority community. He traveled and met with religious and political leaders across Iraq, and formed the embassy's Working Group on Minority Issues, designed to bring a coordinated focus to U.S. activities related to minorities during the reporting period.

The U.S. ambassador and the ambassador's senior advisor to Northern Iraq engaged religious minority communities in their areas. PRT officials, USAID, and U.S. forces in Iraq worked with department and embassy officials to address minority concerns. Embassy officials raised minority concerns in meetings with the country's senior government officials.

As of December 2010, the U.S. government had spent more than \$35 million in projects to support these communities. These projects focused on both the immediate and longer-term needs of these communities, including economic development, essential and humanitarian services, and capacity development.