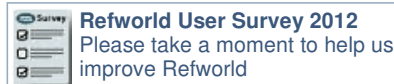


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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Iraq

Chris Chapman

In the run-up to the pull-out of US combat troops at the end of 2011, many observers predicted a significant worsening in the security situation. Certainly the US had played a role in patrolling areas such as the Nineveh Plains and the city of Kirkuk, which have significant minority populations. In fact, while January 2012 saw the highest monthly death toll since August 2010, the number of civilians killed then fell back to levels comparable with the previous year.

Kirkuk city was a centre of much violence throughout 2011, particularly targeting the Turkmen community, notably through killings of prominent individuals such as police officers and business leaders. This prompted the setting up of a parliamentary committee of enquiry, which at the time of writing has still not reported. No-one has claimed responsibility for the deaths but they are likely to be linked to tensions between Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs over political control, access to resources and jobs, and the long overdue referendum over the future status of Kirkuk. Christian churches have also been targeted in the city.

Dohuk governorate, in the Kurdistan region, normally a relative haven of peace, was struck by a series of arson attacks on 37 Christian and Yezidi businesses in December 2011.

According to a survey conducted among 11 minority communities for a 2011 MRG report, minorities in Iraq face considerable problems in gaining proper access to employment, health care or education. Only 47 per cent of members of religious minorities felt safe visiting places of worship. Those surveyed described how they fear wearing religious symbols publicly, especially minority women, who often need to protect themselves from harassment by hiding their religious affiliation.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has signed an exploration and production deal with the international oil giant Exxon Mobil for six blocks, including three in disputed territories bordering the official KRG region. Although the KRG controls these regions *de facto* through the presence of its security forces, its sovereignty over them is not recognized in the Constitution; the federal government has protested against the deal. The blocks include areas of Nineveh and Kirkuk provinces of significant ethnic and religious diversity, in particular a block to the north-east of Mosul, in Nineveh Province, which is inhabited by a patchwork of Shabak, Christian, Yezidi and Kaka'i communities, as well as Kurds and Arabs.

The deal is also controversial because Iraq has still not passed a law on hydrocarbons, defining procedures for awarding oil concessions, the respective rights of the KRG and federal governments to sign deals, the role of foreign companies and export modalities, a draft of which was presented to parliament in 2007. However, the federal government has itself signed exploration deals with multinationals covering fields in the south of Iraq.

Both the federal and Kurdish governments accuse each other of smuggling oil out of the country to bypass revenue-sharing agreements. The KRG has since closed down oil production in protest at the federal government's alleged failure to pay sums owing from a revenue-sharing deal.

In February 2012, an Iraqi court of appeal confirmed death sentences for three people who were convicted of the attack on the Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad in October 2010,

in which 44 worshippers, 2 priests and 7 security force personnel were killed. An accomplice was sentenced to 20 years in prison. While the use of the death penalty is deplorable, it should be noted that the sentences break with a tradition of almost complete impunity for large-scale attacks on Iraqi minority communities.

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