

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

|                                 |                                                                   |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bilagsnr.:</b>               | <b>556</b>                                                        |
| Land:                           | Irak                                                              |
| Kilde:                          | United States Commission on International Religious Freedom       |
| Titel:                          | USCIRF Annual Report 2011 – Countries of Particular Concern: Iraq |
| Udgivet:                        | 28. april 2011                                                    |
| Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet: | 29. august 2011                                                   |

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|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Title</b>            | USCIRF Annual Report 2011 - Countries of Particular Concern: Iraq                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Publisher</b>        | <a href="#">United States Commission on International Religious Freedom</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Country</b>          | <a href="#">Iraq</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Publication Date</b> | 28 April 2011                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Cite as</b>          | United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, <i>USCIRF Annual Report 2011 - Countries of Particular Concern: Iraq</i> , 28 April 2011, available at: <a href="http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c22b.html">http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c22b.html</a> [accessed 29 August 2011] |
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## USCIRF Annual Report 2011 - Countries of Particular Concern: Iraq

[Covers April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011]

**FINDINGS:** Systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations continue in Iraq. Members of the country's smallest religious minorities suffer from targeted violence, threats, and intimidation, against which the government does not provide effective protection. Perpetrators are rarely identified, investigated, or punished, creating a climate of impunity. The smallest minorities also experience a pattern of official discrimination, marginalization, and neglect, particularly in areas of northern Iraq over which the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) dispute control. In addition, sectarian attacks continue between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis, as well as religiously-motivated violence and intimidation against women and secular Iraqis.

Based on these concerns, USCIRF again recommends in 2011 that Iraq be designated as a "country of particular concern," or CPC. USCIRF has recommended CPC status for Iraq since 2008, and placed Iraq on its Watch List in 2007.

The religious freedom situation in Iraq remains particularly grave for the country's smallest, most vulnerable religious minorities, which include Chaldo-Assyrian and other Christians, Sabean Mandaean, and Yazidis. The violence, forced displacement, discrimination, marginalization, and neglect suffered by members of these groups threaten these ancient communities' very existence in Iraq. Although violence in the country has decreased overall, late 2010 saw a surge in attacks against Christians, resulting in a new wave of Christian displacement. The Iraqi government has publicly condemned such violence and made efforts to increase security but continues to fall short in investigating attacks and bringing the perpetrators to justice, despite a few arrests in high-profile cases. As in previous years, sectarian attacks continued to target Shi'a Muslims despite the government's security efforts, and tensions between Sunni and Shi'a Iraqis remained a problem. Women and secular Iraqis also experienced serious religious freedom violations.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:** For Iraq to become a secure, diverse, and stable democracy, the United States must do more to help ensure that the human rights of all Iraqis are guaranteed and enforced in law and practice. 2011 is an important year for Iraq, with a new government finally taking shape after the March 2010 elections and the U.S. military withdrawing. The United States should emphasize, with both the central government and the KRG, the urgent need to protect vulnerable religious minority communities and ensure them justice. Specifically, the United States should work with the Iraqi government and the smallest minorities' political and civic representatives to

help the Iraqi government develop more effective security measures for these particularly vulnerable communities. In addition, U.S. development assistance should prioritize projects in areas where these small minorities are concentrated, and the communities' own political and civic leaders should be consulted in determining the use of such funding. USCIRF also recommends that the U.S. government create an inter-agency task force on Iraqi minority issues and prioritize funding for projects that foster religious tolerance. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy towards Iraq can be found at the end of this chapter.

## Religious Freedom Conditions

### *The Smallest Religious Minorities*

Recent years in Iraq have seen alarming numbers of religiously-motivated killings, abductions, beatings, rapes, threats, intimidation, forced displacements and conversions, and attacks on religious leaders and holy sites. Many Iraqis – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – have been victimized, but those from the country's smallest, non-Muslim religious minorities have been particularly vulnerable. Members of these small groups continue to experience targeted violence and intimidation, lack militia or tribal structures to defend themselves, and do not receive adequate official protection or justice. Large numbers have fled the country or are internally displaced, primarily in northern Iraq.

- *Diminished Numbers*

Half or more of the pre-2003 Iraqi Christian community is believed to have left the country, with Christian leaders warning that the consequence of this flight may be the end of Christianity in Iraq. In 2003, there were thought to be 800,000 to 1.4 million Chaldean Catholics, Assyrian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East members, Syriac Orthodox, Armenians (Catholic and Orthodox), Protestants, and Evangelicals in Iraq. Today, community leaders estimate the number of Christians to be around 500,000.

Sabean Mandaean and Yazidis also have reported significant decreases in their populations. Mandaeans report that almost 90 percent of their small community either has fled Iraq or been killed, leaving some 3,500 to 5,000 Mandaeans in the country, compared to 50,000 to 60,000 in 2003. The Mandaean Associations Union and Mandaean leaders, refugees, and asylum seekers have told USCIRF that they do not see any future for Mandaeans in Iraq and have asked that the group be collectively resettled to a third country so that their religion, language, and culture can survive. The Yazidi community reportedly numbers approximately 500,000, down from about 700,000 in 2005. The Mandaean and Yazidi communities are particularly vulnerable because a person must be born into these religions, not convert or marry into them, and they do not proselytize or seek new adherents. Additionally, Mandaeans, followers of John the Baptist, are prohibited under their religion from using weapons and therefore cannot and do not defend themselves.

Little is known about Iraq's tiny Baha'i and Jewish communities. The Baha'i faith, estimated to have only 2,000 adherents in Iraq, remains banned under a 1970 law. Iraq's ancient and once large Jewish community now numbers fewer than 10, who essentially live in hiding. Many Jews left Iraq in the years following the founding of the state of Israel, and a 2006 law precludes Jews who emigrated from regaining Iraqi citizenship.

- *Continued Targeted Attacks*

Despite an overall drop in violence in the country, the 2010-2011 reporting period saw continued terrorist attacks against the smallest religious minorities and their religious sites. The highest-profile attacks during this period targeted Christians.

On Sunday, October 31, 2010, a hostage siege during a mass at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Baghdad left more than 50 people dead, including two priests,

and more than 60 injured. The extremist group al-Qaeda in Iraq claimed responsibility. This was the worst single attack on Christians in Iraq since 2003. Ten days later, a series of coordinated bomb and mortar attacks targeted Christian homes across Baghdad, killing at least five and injuring at least 30. On December 30, 10 bomb attacks again targeted Christian homes in Baghdad, killed two people, and wounded 20. Several Christians also were shot and killed in both Baghdad and Mosul in November and December 2010. After this series of events, a number of Christians fled Baghdad and Mosul. According to the International Organization for Migration, 1,078 Christian families moved to the KRG region between October 31, 2010 and the end of January 2011. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also reported increased registration of Iraqi Christians in Syria and Jordan in the last two months of 2010, compared to those months the previous year.

The October 31 church attack was publicly condemned by senior Iraqi government officials, including Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, President Jalal Talabani, and KRG President Masoud Barzani, as well as two important Shi'a leaders. The Iraqi government quickly arrested several individuals suspected of involvement in the attack; as of the end of the reporting period they still are in custody but have not yet been tried. Following the attack, the government of Iraq made efforts to increase security at churches and in Christian areas, including sweeping churches for explosive devices before services, increasing patrols in Christian neighborhoods, and providing training for more Christians to protect churches. In addition, the government indicated it would provide compensation to the families of those killed and injured and financial assistance to repair the church. In late 2010, President Talabani called for the establishment of a special government office to address Christian affairs, although this had not been done as of this writing.

Other attacks targeting Christians in the current reporting period included the following: On May 2, 2010, a roadside bomb targeted a convoy of buses taking Christian students to the University of Mosul; one bystander was killed and 70 students injured. On June 10, a Christian businessman was shot and killed outside his house in Kirkuk; press reports said eyewitnesses described the attack as a "targeted killing." On January 15, 2011, a group of armed individuals reportedly entered a private medical clinic in Mosul and shot and seriously injured a Christian cardiologist working there.

In 2010-2011, extremists continued to target shops providing goods or services they deemed "un-Islamic," including liquor stores owned by Christians and Yazidis. Bombs targeted such stores in Baghdad and Sinjar, respectively, on April 13 and June 3, resulting in deaths and injuries. In mid-January 2011 in Baghdad, at least three liquor stores and a Christian social club that served liquor were raided, vandalized, and had property stolen and their occupants threatened by groups of men wearing civilian clothes and wielding pipes and handguns. In all three cases, witnesses reported that police officers or individuals posing as police officers accompanied the attackers. Press reports indicated that in late 2010, the Baghdad provincial council had issued a resolution banning all alcohol sales.

The Mandaean community also continued to be the target of attacks in this reporting cycle. In December 2010, the Mandaean Human Rights Group informed USCIRF that a total of nine Mandaeans were killed throughout Iraq in 2010, including in Basra and Baghdad, and that their community also suffered "tens of kidnapping, theft and threats." Another Mandaean was reported shot and killed on January 13, 2011 in Baghdad.

- *Abuses in Disputed Areas*

The vast majority of the non-Muslim minorities displaced by violence within Iraq in recent years have gone to the north, mainly to Nineveh governorate and the three governorates controlled by the KRG. Northern Iraq, particularly the Nineveh Plains area of Nineveh governorate, is the historic homeland of Iraq's Christian community, and the Yazidi community is indigenous to Nineveh and the KRG governorate of Dahuk. The three KRG governorates are relatively secure, but Nineveh governorate, particularly in and around its capital Mosul, remains extremely dangerous, and control over this ethnically

and religiously mixed area is disputed between the KRG and the central Iraqi government.

The dispute stems from Kurdish efforts to annex into the KRG additional territories – including parts of the governorates of Nineveh, Kirkuk (Tamim), Salah al-Din, Diyala, and Wasit – on the basis of their claim that these areas are historically Kurdish. Since 2003, Kurdish *peshmerga* (armed fighters), security forces, and political parties have moved into these territories, establishing *de facto* control over many of the disputed areas. Religious and ethnic minorities in these areas, including non-Muslims and ethnic Shabak and Turkomen, have accused Kurdish forces and officials of engaging in systemic abuses and discrimination against them to further Kurdish territorial claims. Their accusations include interfering with minorities' voting rights; encroaching on, seizing, and refusing to return minority land; conditioning the provision of services and assistance to minority communities on support for Kurdish expansion; forcing minorities to identify themselves as either Arabs or Kurds; and impeding the formation of local minority police forces. The minorities also accuse both Arab and Kurdish officials of ignoring these vulnerable communities as they focus on their fight for territorial control.

- *Political Representation*

In a positive development for the smallest minorities, the new Iraqi parliament (Council of Representatives or COR) that was elected in 2010 has eight seats reserved for these groups: five for Christians and one each for Mandaean, Yazidi, and Shabak. In addition, six Yazidi candidates were elected to the COR on the Kurdistan Alliance list, bringing the total current number of religious minority parliamentarians to 14 (out of 325). A minority caucus recently was established for the first time in the COR; it includes the representatives of all the ethnic and religious minorities' political parties and is supported by a civil society alliance. According to the U.S. Institute of Peace, which is working to help build its capacity, the caucus' goals for this parliamentary term include reforming the education curriculum to reflect Iraq's minority communities more positively, eliminating discrimination in education and employment, improving the delivery of basic services in minority communities, increasing minorities' participation in all levels of government, and having greater control over local affairs. In addition, in the wake of the October 31 church attack, the new COR speaker created a committee to address the targeting of Christians and other minorities; many of the Iraqi government's actions, including public condemnations of attacks, increased security, and compensation for victims, were recommended by this committee.

- *Autonomy and Constitutional Proposals*

To address their lack of security and political and economic marginalization, some Iraqi minority groups, both inside and outside Iraq, have been seeking an area for Christians, and some say for other minorities as well, in the Nineveh Plains area. These options are variously described as either a protected, semi-autonomous, or autonomous area, and would give effect to Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution, which "guarantee[s] the administrative, political, cultural and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents," and provides that this "shall be regulated by" a future law. However, the specifics of what such a law would entail, including the territory that such an area would cover, its religious and ethnic make-up, how it would be secured, what governance and economic powers it would have, and how it would relate to the KRG and the central government remain disputed even among those who say they favor autonomy.

Many members of the smallest minorities also have urged reforms to provisions in Article 2 of the Iraqi Constitution that give Islam a preferred status. They argue this favoritism towards Islam provides a potential justification for discrimination against non-Muslims. The Iraqi government apparently has made no serious efforts to consider or address any of these proposals.

*Sunnis and Shi'a*

In past years, many serious sectarian abuses were attributed to actors from the Shi'a-dominated Ministries of Interior and Defense and armed Shi'a groups with ties to the Iraqi government or elements within it.

Since 2007, such sectarian violence has diminished markedly. Nevertheless, in its 2010 *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, the State Department continued to note that the "sectarian misappropriation of official authority within the security apparatus" remains a concern. In the past year, there were reports of torture and other abuses, some allegedly along sectarian lines, in detention facilities, including secret prisons run by the Prime Minister's special counterterrorism forces.

Organized groups outside of the government, notably the Sunni-dominated insurgency and foreign and indigenous extremist groups, continued to commit serious sectarian abuses. As in previous years, Shi'a pilgrims were frequent targets, particularly around important holidays. In December 2010 several attacks targeted Shi'a pilgrims commemorating *Ashura* (the anniversary of the death of the Prophet's grandson), killing at least 39. In January 2011, a spate of attacks targeted Shi'a pilgrims traveling to the holy city of Karbala for *Arbaeen* (the end of the 40-day mourning period after *Ashura*), killing at least 75. As in past years, the Iraqi government provided heavy security on pilgrimage routes and at holy sites for both *Ashura* and *Arbaeen*. In mid-February 2011, several attacks targeted Shi'a pilgrims traveling to and from Samarra's *al-Askariya* mosque to mark the anniversary of the death of Hassan al-Askari, Shi'a Islam's 11th imam, resulting in more than 40 dead. There also were attacks in 2010 targeting Sunnis, particularly clerics who had spoken out against al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Sunni-Shi'a mistrust and tensions remained a problem in the current reporting period. Among other issues, the Shi'a-led government's promised integration of Sunni Sons of Iraq members into the security forces or government jobs, expected to occur by the end of 2009, is still not complete. There also were controversies over the participation of certain politicians, mostly Sunnis, in the political process due to alleged Baathist ties.

#### *Women and Other Vulnerable Groups*

In the past year human rights groups continued to express concern about violence against women and girls, including domestic violence and honor killings, throughout Iraq. The State Department also continued to report that extremist groups targeted individuals for "secular leanings" and that, as a result, women and secular Muslims often felt obliged to comply with conservative Islamic norms, particularly relating to dress and public behavior. In recent years, women and girls have suffered religiously-motivated violence and abuses, including killings, abductions, forced conversions, restrictions on movement, forced marriages, and reportedly other violence including rape. Women considered to have violated Islamic teachings and politically-active females have been targeted by Sunni and Shi'a extremists alike.

There were no new reports of targeted violence against homosexuals during the reporting period. During the first half of 2009, at least 25 homosexuals or individuals perceived to be homosexual were killed, and many others reportedly threatened. The Mahdi Army, the militia of the Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, was suspected of perpetrating these attacks, most of which occurred in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood. At the time, there were reports that the violence had been called for by some imams in Sadrist mosques.

#### *Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons*

There have been few developments related to the situation of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) since USCIRF last reported on Iraq. Other than the flight of Christian families from Baghdad and Mosul discussed above, no significant new displacement was reported in 2010. However, according to most estimates, more than three million Iraqis remain displaced in neighboring countries or other areas of Iraq and are in need of significant humanitarian assistance. Many of these individuals have fled religious-based persecution. Members of Iraq's smallest religious minorities continue to

make up a disproportionate percentage of the refugees who have voluntarily registered with UNHCR in the region (around 15 percent, though they comprised only about three percent of Iraq's pre-2003 population).

Voluntary returns to Iraq continued in 2010, but in smaller numbers than in the two prior years. While approximately 350,000 IDPs and nearly 60,000 refugees returned in 2008 and 2009, only 189,000 displaced Iraqis, the majority IDPs, did so in 2010, according to UNHCR. As in past years, few members of the smallest minorities are believed to be among these returnees. UNHCR remains concerned about continuing threats to Iraq's smallest religious minorities and continues to recommend they be given *prima facie* refugee status. It also continues to recommend that Iraqis not be forcibly returned to certain governorates in Iraq, including Nineveh, Kirkuk, and Baghdad, due to continuing insecurity, or to regions that are not their areas of origin, such as the KRG.

## U.S. Policy

The United States is withdrawing its military forces from Iraq. On August 31, 2010, U.S. combat operations ended and the Iraqi government assumed responsibility for security in the country. A transitional force of fewer than 50,000 U.S. troops remains, in an "advise and assist" capacity. Pursuant to the "Status of Forces Agreement between Iraq and the United States," these troops will leave by the end of 2011. At the same time, the U.S. diplomatic mission in Iraq is growing. By late 2011, it will consist of some 17,000 civilians in 15 different locations, including the embassy in Baghdad, two consulates (Erbil and Basra), two embassy branch offices (Mosul and Kirkuk), five office of security cooperation sites, three police training centers, and three air hubs.

Since 2008, U.S.-Iraqi bilateral relations have been governed by a "Strategic Framework Agreement," which emphasizes cooperation in specified areas such as political and diplomatic, defense and security, cultural, and law enforcement and judicial. The Obama administration's stated goal for this bilateral relationship is to help Iraq become "secure, stable and self reliant; with a government that is just, representative, and accountable; that denies support and safe haven to terrorists; is able to assume its rightful place in the community of nations; and contributes to the peace and security of the region."

According to the State Department's 2010 *Advancing Freedom and Democracy Report*, the United States seeks to assist Iraq "to develop just, representative, and accountable government institutions that secure the country's inhabitants and their national infrastructure, deliver essential services, and govern in an equitable, nonsectarian manner." To these ends, U.S. diplomacy and programs support "political and economic reform; political party development; respect for the rule of law and human rights; increased government capacity at the national, provincial, and local levels; and an engaged civil society and citizenry..." A number of the programs that are described include efforts to protect and promote the human rights of women and ethnic and religious minorities. The State Department has designated officials in both Washington and Baghdad to coordinate its efforts on minority issues. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq also serves as the Secretary's Coordinator for Iraq's Religious and Ethnic Minorities, and Embassy Baghdad's Assistant Chief of Mission for Assistance Transition also serves as Coordinator on Minority Issues.

The United States provides significant foreign assistance to Iraq, including funding for security, economic development, and democracy, governance and human rights programs. President Obama's Fiscal Year 2011 budget request asked for \$729.3 million in foreign assistance for Iraq, which would be slightly more than the amounts appropriated in Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009, but less than that in Fiscal Year 2010. In the Fiscal Year 2008 base and supplemental appropriations, and the Fiscal Year 2010 base appropriation, Congress earmarked \$10 million of each measure's foreign assistance funds for projects to assist Iraqi religious and ethnic minorities. As of mid-2010, the State Department and USAID reported that they had spent more than \$24 million on projects for these communities and were in the process of distributing the third \$10 million. However, some Iraqi minority communities have complained of not seeing any

benefits, and in 2010 several members of Congress requested a Government Accountability Office audit of State and USAID's administration of these funds.

The United States contributes to various international and non-governmental organizations assisting Iraqi refugees and IDPs, including more than \$355 million for these purposes in Fiscal Year 2010. In addition, beginning in FY 2007 the U.S. government increased its efforts to resettle Iraqi refugees. Since that time, more than 52,000 Iraqi refugees have been resettled to this country. The United States is now the largest recipient of both UNHCR referrals of Iraqis and resettled Iraqi refugees.

In February 2008, the State Department increased direct access for certain Iraqis to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, as mandated by the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008. That Act created a new Priority 2 (P2) category for Iraqis from "religious or minority" communities with close family members in the United States, and authorized the Secretary of State to create additional P2 categories for other vulnerable Iraqis. (A P2 category allows those covered to apply directly to the United States for resettlement, without first having to be referred by UNHCR. This speeds up the process for those applicants, but it does not guarantee resettlement of all individuals from the category who apply.) The new State Department policy covers Iraqis in Egypt or Jordan "who are the spouses, sons, daughters, parents, brothers or sisters of a citizen of the United States, or ... the spouses or unmarried sons or daughters of a Permanent Resident Alien of the United States...."

## Recommendations

In response to the severe abuses of religious freedom in Iraq, the United States should embrace a multi-faceted approach. It should advocate measures to ensure security, justice, and legal protections for all Iraqis; prioritize human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy and in dealing with the KRG; promote these rights and freedoms through various U.S. programs; and address the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees.

### I. Ensuring Security and Justice for All Iraqis

The U.S. government should:

- in consultation with the smallest religious minorities' political and civic representatives, identify the places throughout Iraq where members of these particularly vulnerable communities worship, congregate, and live; work with the Iraqi government to assess security needs and develop and implement a comprehensive and effective plan for dedicated Iraqi military protection of these sites and areas; and, as the process moves forward, periodically inform Congress on its progress;
- work with the Iraqi government and the smallest religious minorities' political and civic representatives to establish, fund, train, and deploy representative local police units to provide additional protection in areas where these vulnerable communities are concentrated;
- urge the Iraqi government to promptly develop and issue new national identification cards that do not list religious or ethnic identity;
- urge the Iraqi government to continue the process of ensuring greater sectarian integration into the government and security forces so that they better reflect the diversity of the country;
- urge the Iraqi government to ensure that Iraqi government revenues neither are directed to nor indirectly support any militia, para-state actor, or other organization credibly charged with involvement in severe human rights abuses;

- urge the Iraqi government to undertake prompt, transparent, and effective investigations of all human rights abuses, including those stemming from sectarian or religiously-motivated violence, and bring the perpetrators to justice; and
- urge the Iraqi government to fully fund the National Human Rights Commission and ensure that this commission is independent and non-sectarian and that it has a mandate to investigate individual complaints.

## **II. Ensuring Legal Protections for All Iraqis**

The U.S. government should:

- urge the Iraqi government to ensure that provisions in the Iraqi Constitution providing that no law may contradict "the established provisions of Islam" and guaranteeing "the Islamic identity of the majority" are not used to undermine the internationally-guaranteed individual rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief and to equality before the law of every Iraqi; and
- work with minority communities and their representatives to help them reach agreement on what measures are needed to implement Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution, which guarantees "the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all the other constituents," in Nineveh and other areas where these groups are concentrated.

## **III. Prioritizing Human Rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, in U.S. Bilateral and Multilateral Diplomacy**

The U.S. government should:

- ensure that all U.S.-Iraqi cooperation under the Strategic Framework Agreement to "promote Iraq's efforts in the field of ... human rights" places a high priority on the intertwined rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief and freedom of opinion and expression;
- ensure that human rights issues, including freedom of religion or belief, are raised in the context of negotiations on Iraq's accession to the World Trade Organization;
- ensure that human rights issues, including freedom of religion or belief and minority rights, are raised in the context of negotiations between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) concerning disputed internal boundaries; and
- revive the internal, inter-agency U.S. government task force on Iraqi minority issues that previously existed and direct it to consider and recommend policies for the U.S. government to address the needs of Iraq's vulnerable minority communities.

## **IV. Prioritizing Human Rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, in the U.S. Relationship with the KRG**

The U.S. government should:

- press the KRG and Kurdish officials in neighboring governorates to cease any interference with the creation, training, and deployment of representative police forces for minority communities, and link progress on representative policing to U.S. financial assistance and other forms of interaction with the KRG;

- demand immediate investigations of, and accounting for, allegations of human rights abuses by Kurdish regional and local officials against minority communities, including reports of attacks on minorities and expropriation of minority property, and make clear that decisions on U.S. financial and other assistance will take into account whether perpetrators are being investigated and held accountable; and
- work with Iraqi and KRG officials to establish a mechanism to examine and resolve outstanding real property claims involving religious and ethnic minorities in the KRG region and neighboring governorates.

#### **V. Promoting Human Rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, through U.S. Programs**

The U.S. government should:

- fund workshops and training on religion/state issues for Iraqi officials, policymakers, legal professionals, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious leaders, and other members of key sectors of society, including expanding the State Department's International Visitors Program for Iraqis to focus on exchange and educational opportunities related to religious freedom and tolerance;
- provide clear directives to U.S. officials and recipients of U.S. grants to assign greater priority to projects that promote multi-religious and multi-ethnic efforts to encourage religious tolerance and understanding, foster knowledge of and respect for universal human rights standards, build judicial capacity to foster the rule of law, and develop the political ability of ethnic and religious minorities to organize themselves and effectively convey their concerns to the government; and
- ensure that U.S. development assistance prioritizes areas where Iraq's smallest, most vulnerable religious minority communities are concentrated, including the Nineveh Plains area, and that the use of such funding is determined in consultation with the political and civic leaders of the communities themselves.

#### **VI. Addressing the Situation of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees**

The U.S. government should:

- continue to provide significant funding to the UN, humanitarian organizations, host nations, and host communities to provide essential humanitarian aid to vulnerable Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, and encourage the Iraqi government and other countries to do likewise;
- state clearly that the U.S. government will not encourage Iraqi refugees to return voluntarily to Iraq until necessary conditions are met, including security, assistance, legal frameworks, integration programs, and economic opportunities;
- continue its efforts to process a significant number of Iraqi refugees for resettlement to the United States, taking into account the continued targeted violence against members of Iraq's smallest, most vulnerable religious minorities and the P2 designation in the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007; and
- ensure that members of Iraq's smallest, most vulnerable religious minorities scheduled to be resettled to the United States are not delayed unnecessarily by providing adequate personnel to conduct background screening and by enforcing proper application of the existing waiver of the material support bar to individuals forced under duress to provide support to terrorists.

