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Iraq holds more than 19,000 accused of Daesh, militant ties

Daily Sabah (22.03.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2I7GxHY> - Iraq has detained or imprisoned at least 19,000 people accused of connections to the Daesh terrorist group or other terror-related offenses, and sentenced more than 3,000 of them to death, according to an analysis by The Associated Press.

The mass incarceration and speed of guilty verdicts raise concerns over potential miscarriages of justice — and worries that jailed militants are recruiting within the general prison population to build new extremist networks.

The AP count is based partially on an analysis of a spreadsheet listing all 27,849 people imprisoned in Iraq as of late January, provided by an official who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

The AP determined that 8,861 of the prisoners listed in the spreadsheet were convicted of terrorism-related charges since the beginning of 2013 — arrests overwhelmingly likely to be linked to Daesh, according to an intelligence figure in Baghdad.

In addition, another 11,000 people currently are being detained by the intelligence branch of the Interior Ministry, undergoing interrogation or awaiting trial, a second intelligence official said. Both intelligence officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the press.

"There's been great overcrowding ... Iraq needs a large number of investigators and judges to resolve this issue," Fadhel al-Gharwari, a member of Iraqi's parliament-appointed human rights commission, told the AP. Al-Gharwari said many legal proceedings have been delayed because the country lacks the resources to respond to the spike in incarcerations.

Large numbers of Iraqis were detained during the 2000s, when the U.S. and Iraqi governments were battling militants, including al-Qaida, and Shiite militias. In 2007, at the height of the fighting, the U.S. military held 25,000 detainees. The spreadsheet obtained by the AP showed that about 6,000 people arrested on terror charges before 2013 still are serving those sentences.

But the current wave of detentions has hit the Iraqi justice system much harder because past arrests were spread out over a much longer period and the largest numbers of detainees were held by the American military, with only a portion sent to Iraqi courts and the rest released.

Human Rights Watch warned in November that the broad use of terrorism laws meant those with minimal connections to Daesh are caught up in prosecutions alongside those behind the worst abuses. The group estimated a similar number of detainees and prisoners — about 20,000 in all.

"Based on all my meetings with senior government officials, I get the sense that no one — perhaps not even the prime minister himself — knows the full number of detainees," said Belkis Wille, the organization's senior Iraq researcher.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who is running to retain his position in national elections slated for May, has repeatedly called for accelerated death sentences for those charged

with terrorism. The spreadsheet analyzed by the AP showed that 3,130 prisoners have been sentenced to death on terrorism charges since 2013.

Since 2014, about 250 executions of convicted Daesh members have been carried out, according to the Baghdad-based intelligence official. About 100 of those took place last year, a sign of the accelerating pace of hangings.

In the alleged name of democracy: instability, insecurity, terrorism, chaos and massive human rights violations

Some reflections in the aftermath of the Iraq Inquiry and the Chilcot Report

Op-ed by Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l*

HRWF (07.07.2016) - Since the US-led, UK-backed invasion of Iraq in 2003, estimates of the lives lost to violence vary from 250,000 to 600,000. The number of injured will surely be several times that, and the number of men, women and children displaced from their homes is put at between 3.5 and 5 million, somewhere between 1 in 10 and 1 in 6 of the population. Ten of thousands of refugees have died in the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere on their way to the perceived "European Eldorado". Member states of the European Union have been torn apart due to the refugee crisis. The UK is leaving the EU, and populist parties are in the backroom of political power.

There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein was a murderous and vicious dictator but he was not the only one in the world, and in 2003 he posed no greater threat to Middle East peace than Iran (in Syria) and Saudi Arabia (in Yemen) do today. However, the magnitude of the human disaster caused by the invasion and occupation of Iraq by Christian majority democratic countries is incommensurable. Human rights violations in Iraq and in the neighbouring countries, such as Syria, can be multiplied by millions in comparison with those committed by Saddam Hussein's regime. The country is now marred by violence, and the lives of millions of its citizens are shredded. Its ancient biblical heritage has been largely destroyed and looted, and the Christian minorities in the Middle East have been decimated. Iraqi detainees were tortured by the Americans.

The Islamic State and its cohort of suicide bombers coming from all over the world are offsprings of the Bush-Blair couple. IS-backed jihadism is now flourishing in Europe, America, Africa, and Asia.

No lesson was drawn from the tragic experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the same mistake was repeated in Libya with the overthrow of the murderous Muammar Gaddafi. This has led to the de facto partition of the country, instability, insecurity, chaos and many more human rights violations than under the late dictator.

In all those countries, the military intervention of Western powers has opened a Pandora box and has disrupted the fragile balance between the local clans, tribes and religious groups. Democracy cannot be imposed with weapons on people and peoples. The path to democracy is long, bumpy and arduous, and it must be conquered by the people themselves who are ready to pay the cost of their fight, not by foreign powers. Western powers have destroyed the aura of democracy. In people's minds it is equated with political instability, corruption, extreme poverty, migration, insecurity, bomb attempts, and huge death toll. We must not be surprised that people are increasingly despising democracy and long for the times when their children could safely go to school, or when they could safely socialize on a market or restaurant terrace.

Will Bush and Blair ever be judged for destroying countries and lives of millions of people?

Statement by Sir John Chilcot: 6 July 2016

The Iraq Inquiry (06.07.2016) - <http://bit.ly/29iJvY> - We were appointed to consider the UK's policy on Iraq from 2001 to 2009, and to identify lessons for the future. Our Report will be published on the Inquiry's website after I finish speaking.

In 2003, for the first time since the Second World War, the United Kingdom took part in an invasion and full-scale occupation of a sovereign State. That was a decision of the utmost gravity. Saddam Hussein was undoubtedly a brutal dictator who had attacked Iraq's neighbours, repressed and killed many of his own people, and was in violation of obligations imposed by the UN Security Council.

But the questions for the Inquiry were:

- whether it was right and necessary to invade Iraq in March 2003; and
- whether the UK could – and should – have been better prepared for what followed.

We have concluded that the UK chose to join the invasion of Iraq before the peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted. Military action at that time was not a last resort.

We have also concluded that:

- The judgements about the severity of the threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction – WMD – were presented with a certainty that was not justified.
- Despite explicit warnings, the consequences of the invasion were underestimated. The planning and preparations for Iraq after Saddam Hussein were wholly inadequate.
- The Government failed to achieve its stated objectives.

I want now to set out some of the key points in the Report.

First, the formal decision to invade Iraq, if Saddam Hussein did not accept the US ultimatum to leave within 48 hours, was taken by Cabinet on 17 March 2003.

Parliament voted the following day to support the decision.

The decision was, however, shaped by key choices made by Mr Blair's Government over the previous 18 months – which I will briefly set out.

After the attacks on 11 September 2001, Mr Blair urged President Bush not to take hasty action on Iraq.

By early December, US policy had begun to shift and Mr Blair suggested that the US and the UK should work on what he described as a "clever strategy" for regime change in Iraq, which would build over time.

When Mr Blair met President Bush at Crawford, Texas, in early April 2002, the formal policy was still to contain Saddam Hussein. But, by then, there had been a profound change in the UK's thinking:

- The Joint Intelligence Committee had concluded that Saddam Hussein could not be removed without an invasion.
- The Government was stating that Iraq was a threat that had to be dealt with. It had to disarm or be disarmed.
- That implied the use of force if Iraq did not comply – and internal contingency planning for a large contribution to a military invasion had begun.

At Crawford, Mr Blair sought a partnership as a way of influencing President Bush.

He proposed a UN ultimatum to Iraq to readmit inspectors or face the consequences.

On 28 July, Mr Blair wrote to President Bush with an assurance that he would be with him “whatever” – but, if the US wanted a coalition for military action, changes would be needed in three key areas. Those were:

- progress on the Middle East Peace Process;
- UN authority; and
- a shift in public opinion in the UK, Europe and the Arab world.

Mr Blair also pointed out that there would be a “need to commit to Iraq for the long term”.

Subsequently, Mr Blair and Mr Straw urged the US to take the issue of Iraq back to the UN. On 7 September, President Bush decided to do so.

On 8 November, resolution 1441 was adopted unanimously by the Security Council. It gave Iraq a final opportunity to disarm or face “serious consequences”, and it provided for any further breaches by Iraq to be reported to the Security Council “for assessment”. The weapons inspectors returned to Iraq later that month.

During December, however, President Bush decided that inspections would not achieve the desired result; the US would take military action in early 2003.

By early January, Mr Blair had also concluded that “the likelihood was war”.

At the end of January, Mr Blair accepted the US timetable for military action by mid-March.

To help Mr Blair, President Bush agreed to seek a further UN resolution – the “second” resolution – determining that Iraq had failed to take its final opportunity to comply with its obligations.

By 12 March, it was clear that there was no chance of securing majority support for a second resolution before the US took military action.

Without evidence of major new Iraqi violations or reports from the inspectors that Iraq was failing to co-operate and they could not carry out their tasks, most members of the Security Council could not be convinced that peaceful options to disarm Iraq had been exhausted and that military action was therefore justified.

Mr Blair and Mr Straw blamed France for the “impasse” in the UN and claimed that the UK Government was acting on behalf of the international community “to uphold the authority of the Security Council”.

In the absence of a majority in support of military action, we consider that the UK was, in fact, undermining the Security Council’s authority.

Second, the Inquiry has not expressed a view on whether military action was legal.

That could, of course, only be resolved by a properly constituted and internationally recognised Court.

We have, however, concluded that the circumstances in which it was decided that there was a legal basis for UK military action were far from satisfactory.

In mid-January 2003, Lord Goldsmith told Mr Blair that a further Security Council resolution would be necessary to provide a legal basis for military action. He did not advise No.10 until the end of February that, while a second resolution would be preferable, a "reasonable case" could be made that resolution 1441 was sufficient.

He set out that view in written advice on 7 March.

The military and the civil service both asked for more clarity on whether force would be legal. Lord Goldsmith then advised that the "better view" was that there was, on balance, a secure legal basis for military action without a further Security Council resolution. On 14 March, he asked Mr Blair to confirm that Iraq had committed further material breaches as specified in resolution 1441. Mr Blair did so the next day.

However, the precise basis on which Mr Blair made that decision is not clear.

Given the gravity of the decision, Lord Goldsmith should have been asked to provide written advice explaining how, in the absence of a majority in the Security Council, Mr Blair could take that decision.

This is one of a number of occasions identified by the Inquiry when policy should have been considered by a Cabinet Committee and then discussed by Cabinet itself.

Third, I want to address the assessments of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and how they were presented to support the case for action.

There was an ingrained belief in the UK policy and intelligence communities that:

- Iraq had retained some chemical and biological capabilities;
- was determined to preserve and if possible enhance them – and, in the future, to acquire a nuclear capability; and
- was able to conceal its activities from the UN inspectors.

In the House of Commons on 24 September 2002, Mr Blair presented Iraq's past, current and future capabilities as evidence of the severity of the potential threat from Iraq's WMD. He said that, at some point in the future, that threat would become a reality.

The judgements about Iraq's capabilities in that statement, and in the dossier published the same day, were presented with a certainty that was not justified.

The Joint Intelligence Committee should have made clear to Mr Blair that the assessed intelligence had not established "beyond doubt" either that Iraq had continued to produce chemical and biological weapons or that efforts to develop nuclear weapons continued.

The Committee had also judged that as long as sanctions remained effective, Iraq could not develop a nuclear weapon, and that it would take several years to develop and deploy long range missiles.

In the House of Commons on 18 March 2003, Mr Blair stated that he judged the possibility of terrorist groups in possession of WMD was "a real and present danger to

Britain and its national security" – and that the threat from Saddam Hussein's arsenal could not be contained and posed a clear danger to British citizens.

Mr Blair had been warned, however, that military action would increase the threat from Al Qaida to the UK and to UK interests. He had also been warned that an invasion might lead to Iraq's weapons and capabilities being transferred into the hands of terrorists.

The Government's strategy reflected its confidence in the Joint Intelligence Committee's Assessments. Those Assessments provided the benchmark against which Iraq's conduct and denials, and the reports of the inspectors, were judged.

As late as 17 March, Mr Blair was being advised by the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons, the means to deliver them and the capacity to produce them. He was also told that the evidence pointed to Saddam Hussein's view that the capability was militarily significant and to his determination – left to his own devices – to build it up further.

It is now clear that policy on Iraq was made on the basis of flawed intelligence and assessments. They were not challenged, and they should have been.

The findings on Iraq's WMD capabilities set out in the report of the Iraq Survey Group in October 2004 were significant. But they did not support pre-invasion statements by the UK Government, which had focused on Iraq's current capabilities, which Mr Blair and Mr Straw had described as "vast stocks" and an urgent and growing threat.

In response to those findings, Mr Blair told the House of Commons that, although Iraq might not have had "stockpiles of actually deployable weapons", Saddam Hussein "retained the intent and the capability ... and was in breach of United Nations resolutions".

That was not, however, the explanation for military action he had given before the conflict.

In our Report, we have identified a number of lessons to inform the way in which intelligence may be used publicly in the future to support Government policy.

Fourth, I want to address the shortcomings in planning and preparation.

The British military contribution was not settled until mid-January 2003, when Mr. Blair and Mr. Hoon agreed the military's proposals for an increase in the number of brigades to be deployed; and that they would operate in southern, not northern, Iraq.

There was little time to prepare three brigades and the risks were neither properly identified nor fully exposed to Ministers. The resulting equipment shortfalls are addressed in the Report.

Despite promises that Cabinet would discuss the military contribution, it did not discuss the military options or their implications.

In early January 2003, when the Government published its objectives for post-conflict Iraq, it intended that the interim post-conflict administration should be UN-led.

By March 2003, having failed to persuade the US of the advantages of a UN-led administration, the Government had set the less ambitious goal of persuading the US to accept UN authorisation of a Coalition-led interim administration.

When the invasion began, UK policy rested on an assumption that there would be a well-executed US-led and UN-authorized operation in a relatively benign security environment.

Mr Blair told the Inquiry that the difficulties encountered in Iraq after the invasion could not have been known in advance.

We do not agree that hindsight is required. The risks of internal strife in Iraq, active Iranian pursuit of its interests, regional instability, and Al Qaida activity in Iraq, were each explicitly identified before the invasion.

Ministers were aware of the inadequacy of US plans, and concerned about the inability to exert significant influence on US planning. Mr. Blair eventually succeeded only in the narrow goal of securing President Bush's agreement that there should be UN authorisation of the post-conflict role.

Furthermore, he did not establish clear Ministerial oversight of UK planning and preparation. He did not ensure that there was a flexible, realistic and fully resourced plan that integrated UK military and civilian contributions, and addressed the known risks.

The failures in the planning and preparations continued to have an effect after the invasion.

That brings me to the Government's failure to achieve the objectives it had set itself in Iraq.

The Armed Forces fought a successful military campaign, which took Basra and helped to achieve the departure of Saddam Hussein and the fall of Baghdad in less than a month.

Service personnel, civilians who deployed to Iraq and Iraqis who worked for the UK, showed great courage in the face of considerable risks. They deserve our gratitude and respect.

More than 200 British citizens died as a result of the conflict in Iraq. Many more were injured. This has meant deep anguish for many families, including those who are here today.

The invasion and subsequent instability in Iraq had, by July 2009, also resulted in the deaths of at least one hundred and fifty thousand Iraqis – and probably many more – most of them civilians. More than a million people were displaced. The people of Iraq have suffered greatly.

The vision for Iraq and its people – issued by the US, the UK, Spain and Portugal, at the Azores Summit on 16 March 2003 – included a solemn obligation to help the Iraqi people build a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours. It looked forward to a united Iraq in which its people should enjoy security, freedom, prosperity and equality with a government that would uphold human rights and the rule of law as cornerstones of democracy.

We have considered the post-conflict period in Iraq in great detail, including efforts to reconstruct the country and rebuild its security services.

In this short statement I can only address a few key points.

After the invasion, the UK and the US became joint Occupying Powers. For the year that followed, Iraq was governed by the Coalition Provisional Authority. The UK was fully

implicated in the Authority's decisions, but struggled to have a decisive effect on its policies.

The Government's preparations failed to take account of the magnitude of the task of stabilising, administering and reconstructing Iraq, and of the responsibilities which were likely to fall to the UK.

The UK took particular responsibility for four provinces in the South East. It did so without a formal Ministerial decision and without ensuring that it had the necessary military and civilian capabilities to discharge its obligations, including, crucially, to provide security.

The scale of the UK effort in post-conflict Iraq never matched the scale of the challenge. Whitehall departments and their Ministers failed to put collective weight behind the task.

In practice, the UK's most consistent strategic objective in relation to Iraq was to reduce the level of its deployed forces.

The security situation in both Baghdad and the South East began to deteriorate soon after the invasion.

We have found that the Ministry of Defence was slow in responding to the threat from Improvised Explosive Devices and that delays in providing adequate medium weight protected patrol vehicles should not have been tolerated. It was not clear which person or department within the Ministry of Defence was responsible for identifying and articulating such capability gaps. But it should have been.

From 2006, the UK military was conducting two enduring campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. It did not have sufficient resources to do so. Decisions on resources for Iraq were affected by the demands of the operation in Afghanistan.

For example, the deployment to Afghanistan had a material impact on the availability of essential equipment in Iraq, particularly helicopters and equipment for surveillance and intelligence collection.

By 2007 militia dominance in Basra, which UK military commanders were unable to challenge, led to the UK exchanging detainee releases for an end to the targeting of its forces.

It was humiliating that the UK reached a position in which an agreement with a militia group which had been actively targeting UK forces was considered the best option available.

The UK military role in Iraq ended a very long way from success.

We have sought to set out the Government's actions on Iraq fully and impartially. The evidence is there for all to see. It is an account of an intervention which went badly wrong, with consequences to this day.

The Inquiry Report is the Committee's unanimous view.

Military action in Iraq might have been necessary at some point. But in March 2003:

- There was no imminent threat from Saddam Hussein.
- The strategy of containment could have been adapted and continued for some time.
- The majority of the Security Council supported continuing UN inspections and monitoring.

Military intervention elsewhere may be required in the future. A vital purpose of the Inquiry is to identify what lessons should be learned from experience in Iraq.

There are many lessons set out in the Report.

Some are about the management of relations with allies, especially the US. Mr Blair overestimated his ability to influence US decisions on Iraq.

The UK's relationship with the US has proved strong enough over time to bear the weight of honest disagreement. It does not require unconditional support where our interests or judgements differ.

The lessons also include:

- The importance of collective Ministerial discussion which encourages frank and informed debate and challenge.
- The need to assess risks, weigh options and set an achievable and realistic strategy.
- The vital role of Ministerial leadership and co-ordination of action across Government, supported by senior officials.
- The need to ensure that both the civilian and military arms of Government are properly equipped for their tasks.

Above all, the lesson is that all aspects of any intervention need to be calculated, debated and challenged with the utmost rigour.

And, when decisions have been made, they need to be implemented fully.

Sadly, neither was the case in relation to the UK Government's actions in Iraq.

To conclude, I should like to thank my colleagues, our advisers and the Inquiry Secretariat for their commitment to this difficult task.

I also want to pay tribute to Sir Martin Gilbert, who died last year. As one of the preeminent historians of the past century, he brought a unique perspective to our work until he became ill in April 2012. We have missed him greatly as a colleague and friend.

Iraqi families sell organs to overcome poverty

Om Hussein is a mother close to breaking point. Along with her husband and their four young children, she is struggling with poverty like millions of other Iraqis.

BBC (20.04.2016) - <http://bbc.in/1VDRcOF> - Her husband, Ali, is unemployed. He is diabetic and has heart problems. She has been the breadwinner for the past nine years, eking out a living as a housemaid. But she is now exhausted, and can no longer work.

"I am tired and we cannot make any money to pay for the rent, medicine, children's needs and food," Ms Hussein said at the family's temporary one bedroom home in eastern Baghdad.

Their dilapidated house collapsed a few months ago, and they have survived thanks to the help of friends and relatives.

Her husband added: "I worked at everything you could think of. As a butcher, a day labourer, a rubbish collector. I would not ask for money, but they would give it to us. I would not ask for food.

"I would tell my son to collect waste bread from the street and we would eat it, but I never asked for food or money."

Facing such poverty, Ms Hussein was driven to make a huge sacrifice.

"I decided to sell my kidney," she said. "I could no longer provide for my family. It was better than selling my body or living on charity."

The couple approached an illegal trader to sell their kidneys, but initial tests proved their organs were not healthy enough for transplant.

Disappointment followed, and the couple considered taking a desperate solution.

"Because of our miserable conditions we even thought of selling our son's kidney," Ali said, angrily, while pointing at his nine-year-old son, Hussein.

"We would do anything but beg. Why on earth were we in this position?"

The family did not go that far, but they said just the thought of it left them heartbroken.

The organ trade

Grinding poverty has made the trafficking of kidneys and other organs a phenomenon in Baghdad.

About 22.5% of Iraq's population of nearly 30 million people live in abject poverty, according to World Bank statistics from 2014.

Gangs, offering up to \$10,000 (£7,000) for a kidney, have increasingly targeted the country's poor, making it a new hub for the organ trade across the Middle East.

"The phenomenon is so widespread that authorities are not capable of fighting it," said Firas al-Bayati, a human rights lawyer.

"I have personally dealt over the past three months with 12 people who were arrested for selling their kidneys. And poverty was the reason behind their acts," he said.

"Picture this scenario: an unemployed father who does not have any source of income to cater for his children. He sacrifices himself. I consider him a victim and I have to defend him."

In 2012, the government approved a new law in an attempt to combat the trafficking of humans and organs.

Only relatives are allowed to donate their organs to one another and by mutual consent. Traffickers then usually forge the identity documents of both the buyer and the seller to prove they are related.

Penalties vary from three years in prison to the death sentence and judges, al-Bayaty says, do not consider poverty as justification for the deals.

"It is very easy to forge identity papers. But the government will soon introduce new biometric identity cards, which are impossible to counterfeit," he said.

Business gone wrong

We were granted rare access to an Iraqi prison to meet a man who was caught offering kidneys for sale.

After going through multiple security checkpoints, we met Mohammed - he would not give us his full name.

He is serving time in a maximum security facility, along with 10 others convicted of organ trafficking.

"In the very beginning I did not feel guilty," said Mohammed, a father of two.

"I used to look at it as a humanitarian cause, but after a few months in this trade I started questioning the morality - mostly because of the miserable conditions of the organ sellers. It broke my heart seeing young people doing this for money."

He was arrested in front of a government hospital in Baghdad in November 2015 after a police officer posed as a potential buyer.

The majority of the illegal organ transplants take place in private hospitals, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan, according to Mohammed, where he says restrictions are more relaxed than in Baghdad.

But such operations can still take place in state-run hospitals as surgeons admit it is very hard to scrutinise the documents of each case.

"There is no law in the world that holds the surgeon accountable for this," said Rafed al-Akili, a surgeon at the Kidney Diseases and Transplantation Centre in Baghdad.

"It is true that, in some cases, we have doubts, but this is not enough to stop the surgery because without it people will die."

But nothing of this seems to be of any comfort to the Husseins.

Written question HL2303: The Lord Bishop of Worcester 16-09-2015

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Worcester on 16 September 2015

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

To ask Her Majesty's Government how they are supporting the government of Iraq to build an inclusive state that provides for the wellbeing of all its citizens.

Answered by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns on 24 September 2015

We are supporting Prime Minister Abadi in his efforts to rebuild public trust in the Iraqi state, deliver the services and opportunities which all Iraqis want and deserve, and unite Iraq's communities against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and extremism. We welcome the commitments that he has made to inclusivity, to protecting Iraqi citizens, and addressing human rights abuses and holding those responsible to account.

We have contributed £2million to the UN's Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilisation, to help the Iraqi government stabilise areas recently liberated from ISIL and re-establish security, basic services and inclusive local governance. In 2015/16 we will provide

funding for a number of projects designed to support community cohesion and encourage reconciliation, acceptance and tolerance between communities at a grass roots level. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has deployed or reassigned 20 officers to strengthen our efforts in helping the Government of Iraq defeat ISIL. 11 of these officers are in Iraq, to better understand and support the political process, including efforts to reach out to members of the Sunni community.

16 Turkmen bodies found in mass grave near Kirkuk, Iraq

Anadolu (15.03.2015) <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/478649--16-turkmen-bodies-found-in-mass-grave-near-kirkuk-iraq> - Iraqi Kurdish [Peshmerga](#) forces and Shiite militias have discovered a mass grave with 16 Turkmen bodies south of Kirkuk, northern Iraq, during an operation to retake control of Al-Bashir from [Daesh](#) militants.

According to information from security forces in the region, mines on the roads have slowed down the progress of the operation, which was launched three days ago.

Yilmaz Najjar, head of the Badr Brigades, told an AA correspondent that they are working to open a new path as the roads are full of mines.

"A mass grave was found with 16 bodies. The bodies were identified by security forces who found their identity cards. They are Turkmen," Najjar said.

Najjar added that the "operation team is waiting for support... When it comes we will launch a major offensive operation and take control of Bashir in the next 24 hours."

[Peshmerga](#) forces launched an operation on March 12 to liberate the Turkmen village of Al-Bashir. Both militiamen and [Peshmerga](#) forces are fighting together against [Daesh](#) militants.

Clashes between Iraqi forces and [Daesh](#) have been ongoing since June 2014 when the armed group seized Mosul and other territories in [Iraq](#).

Iraqi security forces backed by Shiite militias launched a ground offensive against [Daesh](#) on March 2 to recapture Tikrit city, aiming to approach the [Daesh](#) stronghold of Mosul.

Tikrit, a Sunni-majority city, is the birthplace of deceased Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Official: 200 Iraqi Turkmen women abducted by ISIS

Middle East Monitor (09.03.2015) <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/17393-official-200-iraqi-turkmen-women-abducted-by-isis> - More than 200 Iraqi Turkmen women have been abducted by militants affiliated with the Islamic State (ISIS) and are still awaiting rescue, chairman of the Iraqi Turkmen Front Arshad Al-Salehi said yesterday.

Speaking at a celebration organised by the Turkmen Women's Union to mark International Women's Day in the city of Kirkuk, northern Iraq, Al-Salehi said this is a "sad day" for Turkmen women.

He said ISIS militants had raped many of the women and killed others.

Al-Salehi pointed out that "hundreds of pregnant Turkmen women who fled from Mosul and Tal Afar died after going into labour while on the road and that many of their infants died as well."

He accused the world's media of ignoring the plight of Turkmen women and urged Turkmen politicians to address the injustice suffered by Iraqi women during all human rights conferences they attend outside of Iraq. Adding that the foreign and Arab media continues to ignore the suffering of Turkmen women for "political goals".

The event included an exhibition of drawings depicting life in the shadow of war in Iraq.

Artist Nursal Kojho told the Anadolu Agency that women in Kirkuk were suffering because of ISIS's terrorist attacks.

Nursal said: "Iraqi women, especially mothers who sacrifice their children for the country are living difficult days. As we fight terrorism, we lose our children, our husbands and brothers and I aimed with my paintings to illustrate that and to say stop the sound of weapons, we do not want women to cry."

ISIS burns 8000 rare books and manuscripts in Mosul

Yahoo! Finance (23.02.2015) - While the world was watching the Academy Awards ceremony, the people of Mosul were watching a different show. They were horrified to see ISIS members burn the Mosul public library. Among the many thousands of books it housed, more than 8,000 rare old books and manuscripts were burned.

"ISIS militants bombed the Mosul Public Library. They used improvised explosive devices," said Ghanim al-Ta'an, the director of the library. Notables in Mosul tried to persuade ISIS members to spare the library, but they failed.

The former assistant director of the library Qusai All Faraj said that the Mosul Public Library was established in 1921, the same year that saw the birth of the modern Iraq. Among its lost collections were manuscripts from the eighteenth century, Syriac books printed in Iraq's first printing house in the nineteenth century, books from the Ottoman era, Iraqi newspapers from the early twentieth century and some old antiques like an astrolabe and sand glass used by ancient Arabs. The library had hosted the personal libraries of more than 100 notable families from Mosul over the last century.

During the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the library was looted and destroyed by mobs. However, the people living nearby managed to save most of its collections and rich families bought back the stolen books and they were returned to the library, All Faraj added.

"900 years ago, the books of the Arab philosopher Averroes were collected before his eyes...and burned. One of his students started crying while witnessing the burning. Averroes told him... the ideas have wings...but I cry today over our situation," said Rayan al-Hadidi, an activist and a blogger from Mosul. Al-Hadidi said that a state of anger and sorrow are dominating Mosul now. Even the library's website was suspended.

"What a pity! We used to go to the library in the 1970s. It was one of the greatest landmarks of Mosul. I still remember the special pieces of paper where the books' names were listed alphabetically," said Akil Kata who left Mosul to exile years ago.

On the same day the library was destroyed, ISIS abolished another old church in Mosul: the church of Mary the Virgin. The Mosul University Theater was burned as well, according to eyewitnesses. In al-Anbar province, Western Iraq, the ISIS campaign of burning books has managed to destroy 100,000 titles, according to local officials. Last December, ISIS burned Mosul University's central library.

Iraq, the cradle of civilization, the birthplace of agriculture and writing and the home of the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Arab civilizations had never witnessed such an assault on its rich cultural heritage since the Mongol era in the Middle Ages.

Last week, a debate in Washington and Baghdad became heated over when, how and who will liberate Mosul. A plan was announced to liberate the city in April or May by more than 20,000 US trained Iraqi soldiers. Either way, and supposing everything will go well and ISIS will be defeated easily which is never the case in reality, that means the people of Mosul will still have to wait for another two to three months.

Until then, Mosul will probably have not a single sign of its rich history left standing.

The missing piece in the Syria-Iraq debate: The Turkmen

The Turkmen across Syria and Iraq are stuck between sectarian conflict and Kurdish nationalism

Fair Observer (13.10.2014)

http://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/the-missing-piece-in-the-syria-iraq-debate-01428/ Unlike the Kurds — the largest stateless ethnic group in the region — the Turkmen are not armed and are now struggling for their survival. Their continued existence is important because, as traditional moderates and natural links to Turkey, the Turkmen could be vital in building peace after the dust settles.

Who are the Turkmen?

Though the Turkmen are culturally and linguistically similar to their kin in Turkey, their tribes first settled in the region in the 9th century. Renowned for their horsemanship and soldiering, Turkmen tribes, in one way or another, were part of the military elite up until the early 1900s. They became part of the Ottoman Empire with the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, the Ottoman's legendary victory over the Safavid Empire. The Ottomans took care to settle Turkmen along the cities on route to the Hijaz — present-day Saudi Arabia — to secure the pilgrimage path.

As the Ottoman Empire disintegrated in the wake of World War I, the Turkmen found themselves as a minority in the two Arab-majority Kingdoms of Syria and Iraq. The past century then brought de-colonization, Arab nationalism and war. Yet Turkmen have managed to preserve their way of life. They speak a dialect of modern Turkish at home, but many are more comfortable with Arabic. Their practice of Islam remains close to the moderate Anatolian tradition.

Syria's Turkmen

Syria's Turkmen are located in the Levantine Latakia province and the northern regions of Aleppo and Raqqa, close to the Turkish border, as well as the central city of Homs. The Syrian regime, headed by President Bashar al-Assad, has often fudged their population numbers, leading experts to think of the Turkmen as a tiny minority. The true figure of

Syrian Turkmen is likely to be much higher. Turkmen leaders claim they number 3.5 million. No reliable census exists to verify these claims, but taking a number of known Turkmen-majority villages into account, these authors estimate that there are between 2-3 million Turkmen in Syria.

The Turkmen had a good start in Syria. Two of the Arab Republic's early presidents were Turkmen, including the two-term President Hashim al-Atassi, whose family remains influential in Homs. Starting in the 1960s, however, the pan-Arab Baathist movement sidelined non-Arabs from politics. Then-President Hafez al-Assad's rule was devastating to the Turkmen. He banned Turkish-language education, eradicated traces of Turkmen culture and redistributed the community's land. Squeezed out of their possessions and way of life, the Turkmen identity was pushed out of the public eye.

Syria and Iraq are now one battleground involving local militants, governments and foreign jihadists. In this mix, ethnic Turkmen are the largest population that is seldom talked about.

The civil war in Syria of the past three years has rekindled Turkmen politics. At the beginning of the conflict in 2011, most Turkmen joined the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a moderate rebel group. As more Syrians took up arms, they formed their own brigades under the FSA umbrella. What is certain is there are currently more than ten armed Turkmen groups defending their positions against the Assad regime or IS. Despite being Sunni-majority, very few Turkmen seem to have joined IS ranks — certainly the least of all other Sunni groups. "They couldn't find people among us because the Turkmen way of life is different from theirs," Abdurrahman Mustafa, the president of the Syrian Turkmen Assembly said. "That made us ISIL's [IS] number one target."

The Iraqi Turkmen

Iraq's roughly 2 million Turkmen are spread over a strip of land between the Kurds and Arabs, ranging from Mosul to Diyala province. Their recent history has not been easier than their kin in Syria. Starting in the late 1950s, the Iraqi regime massacred Turkmen elites, closed their schools, renamed their villages and, in many instances, forced them to change their names under a policy of Arabization. This was done by the communist regime, as well as the Baathists and Saddam Hussein later on. Despite the merciless campaign, however, they held onto more of their wealth and social standing than Syria's Turkmen. Nouri al-Said, a former Iraqi prime minister and the son of a Turkish Pasha, and many of his colleagues who served before the coup in 1958 were Turkmen. More recent notables include journalists Nermin el-Mufti and Abbas Ahmet, or the poetess Munevver Molla Hassun.

In 1995, Iraq's Turkmen founded the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) with Turkey's assistance. The ITF served as an umbrella group for regional Turkmen political leaders, which allowed them to organize in the wake of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. That stands in contrast to Syrian Turkmen, who only formed political organizations at the onset of the civil war. By the time Iraq formed its first government in 2005, the Turkmen had a civil body of elected leaders, representatives in the Iraqi parliament and offices in foreign capitals, including Ankara, Washington DC and London. But the organization lacked one critical element to wield power in Iraq: weapons. To this day, its lightly armed militia can barely protect its leaders from assassination attempts.

This inability to take and hold territory has come at a high price to the Turkmen community during the IS surge this summer. The Turkmen suffered terrible blows in Tuz Kharmatu, Tel Afer, which is their biggest territory, and Amirli, a city between Kirkuk and Baghdad. Most affected Turkmen tribes had no choice but to flee from IS advances. Shiite Turkmen were subject to the worst massacres, but Sunni tribes have also fallen prey to IS. One Sunni Turkmen leader allegedly killed his two daughters with poison upon

IS' approach. The only group strong enough to put up a fight have been the Abbasiyun, the largest of Tel Afer's Sunni Turkmen tribes.

Yet the sectarian division in Iraq's Turkmen tribes has become undeniable. Sunni Turkmen, who make up roughly half of its community in Iraq, were a double minority during Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shiite-majority rule. When IS called for Sunni tribes to rise up against Baghdad, some of them answered. Sources suggest that a number of Turkmen are now in high-ranking positions in IS. The group might also be taking advantage of its Turkmen members for its contacts with Turkey. When IS attacked the Turkish consulate in Mosul and took 46 citizens hostage, it was the jihadist group's Turkmen members who communicated with the captives, according to some accounts.

But the ITF remains devoted to its founding principle of including both sects among its members. Ersad Salihi, the ITF's leader, pointed out in a talk in Ankara that three of its candidates for Mosul's elections were Sunnis and have been kidnapped by IS. The ITF, he says, has been the jihadist group's main target in Mosul, despite the entirely Sunni makeup in the city.

Turkmen: Kurdish Relations in Iraq

One important dynamic for Iraqi Turkmen's future is their relationship with the Kurds. Nominally, the two communities are allies. The Turkmen occupy a handful of seats in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament, and Turkmen forces have fought alongside the Peshmerga — Kurdish armed forces — against IS. Under the surface, however, things are more complicated.

The Turkmen do not receive the protection Christian minorities get, nor do they have the institutional makeup to defend themselves the way the Kurds have. They are alone on the frontlines of the IS onslaught and their numbers are thinning by the day.

The Kurds have held up better against the IS onslaught than the Iraqi army, giving them more sway in the country's future. When the army fled the city fearing an IS attack, Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), ordered his forces to seize control of Kirkuk, which Kurds see as their historical capital. For Turkmen, this was a serious encroachment on their presence.

Kurdish and Turkmen territories overlap across several critical territories. Turkmen leaders like to point out that half a century ago, most of Erbil's population was Turkmen. More importantly, however, the Turkmen were the majority in Kirkuk's center before 2003. After the Saddam regime was toppled, Peshmerga troops stormed into the city's downtown area and vandalized many Turkmen and Arab properties. They also had the foresight to burn land deeds from Kirkuk's Land Registry Office, to prevent Turkmen from taking back their property in future lawsuits. The Turkmen who remained in Kirkuk have been struggling to hold onto their place ever since. Now that the city is entirely in Kurdish hands, the Turkmen fear they will be forced out entirely.

Yet Salihi has not abandoned hope of Turkmen-Kurdish cooperation. He wants to negotiate with the Kurdish leadership to lend Kirkuk a special status that would allow it to flourish as a pluralistic city after the war. "We shared the suffering and prison of the Saddam years with our Kurdish brothers," he said at a meeting in Ankara, "but we wish that we had been included in the political process after 2003, just like they were."

International Help

Part of the Turkmen's dire situation is due to the lack of foreign aid. The US and Europe have been timid about arming rebel groups, much less identifying the Turkmen specifically as a community in need of protection.

In August, when IS laid siege to Amirli in Iraq, the only aid the Shiite Turkmen town had for nearly two months was a helicopter that carried supplies in from Baghdad twice a week. For months, the only foreign power to help them during the siege was Iran, sending its famous Gen. Kassim Suleimani to the Shiite Turkmen's aid. Only in September did US drones provide enough air cover for the population to be evacuated. That stands in stark contrast to the sensitivity Western countries have showed for Christian and Yazidi minorities.

At least part of this is due to the assumption that Turkey stands as a natural ally to the Turkmen and will provide any aid necessary. However, that has not entirely been the case. Ankara does have good relations with the Turkmen, donning out generous educational scholarships in the past and, more recently, humanitarian assistance.

But the big brother to the north has proved timid when it comes to war. Syrian Turkmen lament that Turkey has provided little beyond a trickle of light weaponry — none more, according to Turkmen leaders, than it gave to Sunni Arab groups. "If we had received the weapons we desperately asked Turkey for," a Turkmen commander said, "the majority-Turkmen areas would have been free of the ISIS [IS] threat." The president of the Syria Turkmen Council, Abdurrahman Mustafa, said: "As ISIS [IS] parades around with the scud missiles and tanks it got from its Raqqa raid, we have to worry about how to save ammunition for our rifles."

The matter has become a sore point with Turkey's AK Party government. The Nationalist People's Party (MHP), the country's second-largest opposition party, has repeatedly called on the government to increase its aid to the Turkmen. Ahmet Davutoglu, then-foreign minister and the current prime minister, periodically assures them that his government has been helping the Turkmen as much as possible. Yet the MHP does not seem convinced. This summer, parliamentarians got into a fistfight when Sinan Ogan of the MHP gave a fiery speech condemning the government's inaction. More recently, leftists such as the Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of the main opposition People's Republican Party (CHP), have also accused the AK Party of neglecting the Turkmen.

That leaves the Turkmen in a precarious position. The Turkmen do not receive the protection Christian minorities get, nor do they have the institutional makeup to defend themselves the way the Kurds have. They are alone on the frontlines of the IS onslaught and their numbers are thinning by the day.

If that continues, it will significantly impoverish the region. The Turkmen have much to offer by helping to rebuild Syria and Iraq — whatever shape those territories will take. Economically, they are a natural link to the commercial centers across the border in Turkey. More importantly, the Turkmen are moderates with a tradition of local, representative government. That is why anyone with a stake in the region's stability should be concerned about the Turkmen's predicament between Arab sectarianism and Kurdish nationalism today.

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Iraqi women targeted for execution by IS

The Islamic State (IS) does not make any distinction in terms of sex, sect or race when committing its heinous crimes. IS has recently focused its terrorism on civilian women who are active in politics, human rights, media and medicine.

Al-Monitor (10.10.2014) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/10/islamic-state-execution-women-iraq.html#> - On Oct. 6, IS executed a Turkmen former parliamentarian for the province of Ninevah, Iman Mohammed Younis al-Salman, more than a month after she was abducted from her home in the district of Tal Afar.

The militant group refused to hand over Salman's body to her family and instead threw it down a well. Salman was the first woman to enter the parliament for the district of Tal Afar and became a member of the House of Representatives in 2004. She was also the first woman to preside over a civil society organization in Tal Afar — the humanitarian organization Al-Malak — and the first woman journalist in the history of the Tal Afar district.

Late on the night of Oct. 8, IS militants executed eight women, shooting them in central Mosul, without stating any reasons for their act. These women included Dr. Maha Sabhan, a surgeon; Dr. Lamia Ismail and six other women who were housewives. Their bodies were handed over to forensics.

Samira Salih al-Nuaimi, a lawyer and human rights activist, was killed by IS members in mid-September in Mosul "for criticizing IS on social networking sites by calling it a 'Non-Islamic State.'"

Sources in Mosul told Al-Hayat that Nuaimi, also known as Um al-Nakhwa, was executed in a public square. During the same period, 30 other people from Mosul were executed, including four women. A few days ago, the group issued a statement telling their families to collect their bodies from the forensics department, because the city morgue was full.

A report issued by the United Nations Mission for Iraq covering the period from July 6 to Sept. 10, 2014, said that IS violations included kidnapping, rape and other forms of sexual and physical violence against women and children.

The report added, "Various ethnic and religious components of the Iraqi community, be they Turkmen, Shabaks, Christians, Yazidis, Mandaism, Feyli Kurds, Arab Shiites and others, have been harmed in particular."

It explained that IS-linked armed groups targeted these sectors deliberately and systematically and committed serious violations of human rights designed to destroy, suppress and eliminate their presence in IS-controlled areas.

This violence against women in particular is not arbitrary, but rather a weapon used by IS to terrorize Iraqi women to force them to abide by the Sharia provisions that it is imposing, such as wearing the niqab. The group's practices limit their freedoms and silences them out of fear that the circle of women opposing its laws will expand.

Lawyer & human rights defender Samira Saleh Al-Naimi executed by ISIS in Mosul

Gulf Center for Human Rights (23.09.2014) <http://gc4hr.org/news/view/758> - With utmost sorrow and grief, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) received the news of the execution by the so called Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) of lawyer and human rights defender **Samira Saleh Al-Naimi** in the city of Mosul, Iraq.

Reports confirmed that on the evening of 22 September 2014, a group of masked armed men who belong to ISIS opened fire and killed her in a public square in the very heart of Mosul. She was kidnapped by ISIS from her home last week after she described as "barbaric" the widespread damage that ISIS inflicted on ancient features of her city.

Samira Saleh Al-Naimi is a prominent lawyer and human rights defender and famous for her activities that include defending detainees and supporting the disadvantaged families in the city.

The GCHR condemns in the strongest terms the execution of Samira Saleh Al-Naimi and believes it is solely motivated by her peaceful and legitimate human rights work, in particular defending the civil and human rights of her fellow citizens in Mosul. The GCHR believes that this heinous crime and other ISIS crimes are crimes against humanity.

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights urges the UN and relevant international institutions to:

1. Carry out an immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into the execution of Samira Saleh Al-Naimi and other crimes committed by ISIS with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in line with local laws and international standards;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and journalists in Iraq are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions including judicial harassment.

Iraq's forgotten IDPs

IRIN (22.08.2014) -<http://www.IRINnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=100524> - In recent weeks the world's attention has fixed on the plight of the Christians and Yazidis of northern Iraq as hundreds of thousands have fled advancing Islamic militants to the semi-autonomous Kurdistan. Yet across the country the same number again of Iraqis have fled their homes since January to other regions, receiving far less attention and support. While the UN and NGOs are trying to reach them with aid, many feel forgotten and complain of preferential treatment.

Following the start of a northward surge in late June by the jihadist group calling themselves the Islamic State (IS), the international community has rushed to the support of Kurdistan.

[<http://www.irinnews.org/report/100209/aid-agencies-scramble-to-support-iraq-displaced>]

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has mounted what it is calling its "largest single aid push in a decade", with a plan to send in more than 2,000 tons of tents and other items,

and governments from around the world, who in recent years had wound down their assistance for Iraq, are also flying in large quantities of aid and military equipment. [<http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unhcr-launches-major-aid-push-iraq-100-ton-airlift-erbil>] [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-arrives-for-displaced-iraqis-across-northern-iraq>]

Semi-autonomous Kurdistan - with a population of just over five million and an existing caseload of 220,000 Syrian refugees - has been the base of the relief effort. The region certainly needs support - it is now hosting what is believed to be more than 700,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom endured gruelling journeys to reach safety. [<http://livewire.amnesty.org/2014/01/03/life-getting-harder-for-syrian-refugees-in-iraqi-kurdistan/>] [<http://www.unhcr.org/53f490159.html>]

Yet Kurdistan is not the only part of Iraq where people require help. Away from the glare of the international media being shone on the tented camps of Yezidis in Dohuk, another 700,000 people are currently homeless. [<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/video/unhcr-documents-trauma-suffered-displaced-172432252.html>]

Among them are some 70,000 sheltering in the holy Shia cities of Karbala and Najaf. They are being supported mainly by mosques and local associations, who have made available accommodation usually used by religious pilgrims, the Iraqi Red Crescent, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

There have also been small contributions from UN agencies, such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), who have provided water and other supplies, but people there told IRIN their needs were desperate.

Abdul Ghafour Ahmed, a member of Iraq's long-persecuted Turkoman ethnic group, told how he and his family of nine fled their home in Tal Afar, west of the city of Mosul, in early June, but were blocked, he said, from entering the majority Sunni Kurdistan, so he headed south to Najaf by road. [<http://www.irinnews.org/report/100325/analysis-iraq-s-minorities-under-fire>]

"After ISIS swept through our village, we tried to go to Kurdistan, but they didn't receive us for being from the Shi'ite sect," the 67-year-old said. While IRIN was not able to verify his story, there have been growing allegations that the Kurdish government has turned away some of those fleeing. "They were receiving only Kurds and Sunnis. We spent four days at the main border entrance to Kurdistan, but got nothing." [<http://www.irinnews.org/report/100357/selective-treatment-for-idps-in-kurdistan>]

Muhsin Al-Timimi, the head of the human rights committee at Najaf Provincial Council, also told IRIN that not enough aid had come to his part of Iraq. "We demand international organizations to stand equally with IDPs all over Iraq. They are giving more to those in Kurdistan and no one cares about us," he said.

Under siege

But Najaf and Karbala are at least safe. Large swathes of the governorates of Nineveh, Anbar, Salehaddin and Diyala are overrun by armed groups with front lines moving on a daily basis. As battles rage between militants and government forces, civilians are being killed, injured and cut off from humanitarian supplies. [<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/iraq-tikrit-islamic-state-201481991319267358.html>]

The situation is particularly acute in a small Shia Turkomen town of Amirli in the Tuz District of Salehaddin Governorate, located mid-way between Baghdad and Kurdistan's

capital Erbil, under siege from IS. [<http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/ocha-flash-update-iraq-crisis-amirli-salah-al-din-no-1-17-august-2014>]

Between 15,000 and 20,000 people have been surrounded and trapped, and all roads in and out blocked. The population has formed a local army and is defending itself against the militants, with some support from the Iraqi security forces, but as the weeks go on, their resolve is weakening and they are running low on food, water, fuel and medical supplies. During the sweltering Iraqi summer, where temperatures reach 50 degrees, families sleep on the roofs of their homes to keep cool, but with constant rocket attacks they must stay inside. [<http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/08/15/amerli-iraqs-other-humanitarian-crisis-a-few-hundred-fighters-fighting-to-protect-town-from-isis-jihadists/>]

"People are dying because of the lack of clean water, while diarrhoea and vomiting are common," Dr Vasser Mahmoud*, who is volunteering in the area, told IRIN by phone Amirli.

"The children are malnourished. There isn't enough milk for the babies. Sometimes I can only make a mix of sugar water to nourish them and give them energy," he said.

A few people have been airlifted out of the town by the Iraqi Air Force, but a recent negotiated attempt to move a group of children, women and elderly people towards Sulymaniah went wrong and as many as 30 people are reported to have been killed trying to escape. [<http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/ocha-flash-update-iraq-crisis-amirli-salah-al-din-no-1-17-august-2014>]

"All the people are hungry, my family tell me they are only eating a little bit because we need to save food for the other days," said Muhammed Essmat Ibrahim, a board member of the Iraqi Red Crescent, who is based in Baghdad but whose relatives are in Amirli.

According to the UN, which says it has been seeking a way to get food Amirli for several weeks, the Iraqi Air Force has been providing limited humanitarian assistance through airdrops and the Iraqi Red Crescent, though the last delivery was over a month ago.

"The Iraqi government has been trying to assist them. It's not like no-one is trying to assist them," explained Kieran Dwyer, chief of communications for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OHCA), but he said the UN was unable to get physical access to the town due to security.

Preferential treatment?

Those in towns such as Karbala and Amirli increasingly accuse the international community of preferential treatment. Zaid Al-Ali, an Iraqi lawyer and the author of **The Struggle for Iraq's Future**, agreed that people did not see the response as equal. [<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141327/zaid-al-ali/the-struggle-for-iraqs-future-how-corruption-incompetence-and-se>]

"There is a complaint that Kurdistan is getting preferential treatment compared to Baghdad, no question. That's from among officials and from among the general population," he said.

Al-Ali added that a number of other places had also been, and were still under, IS control, but he said the international media and to a large extent governments had "mostly ignored" them and focused on Sinjar and Kurdistan.

NGOs, too, are increasingly aware that their coverage is not seen to be equal. "I think the humanitarian community as a whole is not doing enough to access the areas where

the most vulnerable persons are," said Juan Gabriel Wells, deputy country director for Jordan and Kurdistan for French NGO Action Against Hunger (ACF).

"These are areas where people are affected by fighting, like Anbar, Salehaddin Kirkuk and Diyala. [and]. I think that a lot of these areas have been neglected not just now, but for far too long."

International NGOs, often perceived to be more at risk, are increasingly seeking to work with local partners to improve coverage across the country. Saleh Dabbakeh, ICRC spokesman in Baghdad, told IRIN that ICRC teams - including international staff - were working in 12 out of Iraq's 19 governorates, though he admitted that Amiri was too dangerous to reach due to the siege. [<http://www.ncciraq.org/en/about/ncci/updates/item/6595-ncci-continuous-mapping-national-ngos-in-iraq>]

However, he said they had managed to negotiate some access to deliver medical and other supplies into Anbar, the province where IS (ISIS at the time) began its advance in January and from where 600,000 people have been displaced, and into other areas under control of armed groups. [<http://www.irinnews.org/report/99611/old-fault-lines-new-flashpoints-in-iraq-s-anbar>]

"We continue to talk to all parties involved in this fighting and armed conflict in order to be able to access areas," he said. "But if we can't reach an area, we do the next best thing and supply to places where people are being displaced."

Dabbakeh welcomed the significant international response for the displaced in Kurdistan, which has included a lump-sum donation of US\$500million from Saudi Arabia, but added: "Yes the minorities from the Nineveh plain have been victimized, but we should not forget that there are all kinds of other people that have also been victims and also been displaced."

[<http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/iraq-500-million-respond-massive-humanitarian-crisis>] [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ECDM_20140820_Iraq_IDPs_v2.pdf]

Defending the UN's lack of aid operations outside Kurdistan, OCHA's Dwyer said: "We are getting everywhere where we can within our security limitations. This is Iraq, the security limitations are not arbitrarily or unnecessarily applied; it's a dangerous place."

Call for corridors

In the past week there have been several calls for negotiated humanitarian corridors to allow aid workers access to people in militant-controlled areas.

[<http://www.acted.org/en/iraq-i-call-opening-humanitarian-corridor-people-displaced-sinjar>]

But Dwyer said: "The security situation in Iraq is immensely complicated and things are changing and moving very fast. What is a safe area one day can very rapidly become not safe the next.

"This notion of a humanitarian corridor might sound simple enough, but it is actually very complicated. Not all armed groups are the same, so being able to negotiate with one or two, doesn't mean that you are going to [get] full and free access to where you want to be."

He stressed the risks involved with aid workers going into these areas had to be taken into account. [<http://www.irinnews.org/report/100515/international-humanitarian-day-staying-safe>]

* The doctor's name has been changed to protect his identity

Report on Assyrians in Iraq calls for humanitarian, military aid

AINA (20.08.2014) - A report released yesterday by the Assyria Council of Europe (<http://www.assyriacouncil.eu>) paints a bleak picture for the Assyrians of Iraq. The report, titled **Facing Annihilation: Innocent Assyrian victims of an unfolding Genocide**, presents a short history of Assyrians in Iraq since that country gained its independence in 1932, then discusses the developments since June 10, 2014, when the Islamic State (ISIS) captured Mosul.

The report also discusses the plight of Yazidis, Shabaks and Turkmen, who were also targeted by ISIS.

The report outlines the actions of ISIS in Mosul and the Nineveh Plain, home to the largest concentration of Assyrians in Iraq. Among that actions taken by ISIS were:

- Imposing Sharia law in Mosul
- Imposing *jizya* on Assyrians
- Destroying Christian religious institutions
- Ordering women to completely veil themselves and not leave the home without a male escort
- Ordering unmarried women to report for "sexual Jihad"
- Killing Unveiled Christian women
- Killing Thousands of Shiites and Yazidis
- Cutting of water and electricity to the Nineveh Plain
- Confiscating homes of Assyrians
- Seizing the Chaldean Patriarchate
- Marking Christian homes to identify them

ISIS moved into the Nineveh Plain and captured several Assyrian towns, causing 200,000 Assyrians to flee north to Dohuk and east to Ankawa in Arbel.

According to the report:

The Assyrians in Iraq currently number between 300,000 and 450,000. In 2003 their population was estimated at 1-1.5 million, and they now constitute a third of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries. This has come about as a result of Assyrian churches, businesses and homes throughout Iraq becoming the target of coordinated attacks. Kidnappings, as well as verbal and written threats to convert to Islam, pay jizyah (an extortion tax imposed upon non-Muslims), leave the country or else suffer death, have also been commonplace. In February 2008, the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, Mar Paulus Faraj Rahho, was abducted and killed. Other priests and religious figures have also been murdered or kidnapped. In total, more than 413 Christians were killed between 10 April 2003 and 23 March 2012, and 46 churches were attacked or bombed, leaving 95 dead.

Some of the recommendations of the report are:

- Designate as disaster areas the towns and districts of Sinjar, Bakhdida (Qaraqosh/Hamdaniyah), Bartillah, Ba'shiqah, Tel-Kayf, Alqosh, Shaykhan, Tal-A'far, Tuz, Amerli, Bashir and Taza

- Provide all means of support, including immediate shipments of food, water, tents and other emergency relief aid to agencies coping with the current humanitarian crisis in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.
- Clear the areas from ISIS, restore security and stability, and return the displaced people to their homes safely.
- Designate the acts perpetrated by ISIS against Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabak and Turkmen in north Iraq as crimes against humanity, denounce them as genocide, and demand the prosecution of the perpetrators.
- Allow the formation, training and armament of new Iraqi military and police units manned and commanded by Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabak and Turkmen, to aid in the liberation of their areas from ISIS.
- Implement the agreement, made by Iraqi Parliament and Cabinet on January 21, 2014, to create new provinces not only in areas where the existence of minority groups is under threat, such as the Nineveh Plain, Tel-Afar, Tuz-Khurmatu, but also in Sinjar.
- Stop regarding the Assyrians (including Chaldeans and Syriacs) as a religious minority, and refrain from calling them Christians. They are the oldest inhabitants of Iraq and, as such, they should have the same rights enjoyed by the Arabs, Kurds and others in the country.
- Issue an international resolution for the establishment of one or more safe havens for people from Iraq's embattled minority groups and, if need be, send in UN peacekeeping forces to protect them and ensure that refugees are restored to their homes safely.

Read the full report at <http://aina.org/reports/facann.pdf>

Turkmens desperately call on Turkey to be let in

European Turkmen Friendships (09.08.2014) – <http://turkmenfriendship.blogspot.com.es>
 - Turkmen fleeing the terrorist group "Islamic State" (IS) in Iraq have been crying out to be granted entry into Turkey, but their calls seem to have fallen to deaf ears in the Turkish capital, which is so far only sending humanitarian aid to those whose lives are in jeopardy.

"We ask Turkey to let us cross the border," Yasin Muhammed Yunus, a 55-year-old Turkmen who arrived in Turkey about a month ago, told Sunday's Zaman.

Members of the opposition parties have criticized the government for ignoring the plight of Turkmen in Iraq and for denying them entry into Turkey despite the fact that the country is currently hosting around 1.5 million refugees from Syria.

It is estimated that several thousand Turkmen have died since the IS launched its offensive in Iraq. At least 300,000 Turkmen are believed to have fled their homes in the past two months because of the IS terrorist attacks.

Yunus, a civil engineer who was based in Mosul before the IS captured the province in June, was only able to make it to Turkey thanks to a Kurdish friend who works as a civil servant. The peshmerga forces of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq do not allow Turkmen to pass through the Kurdish region which has a border with Turkey.

In an official car, his friend took him to the Habur customs gate at the Turkish-Iraqi border. Yunus had to leave his family, who are struggling to survive in the difficult conditions in Iraq.

Most recently, in an offensive over last weekend, the IS seized three more towns in northern Iraq. These towns were home to Turkmens and Yazidis, tens of thousands of whom were forced to flee from Zumar and Sinjar to the KRG territory in northern Iraq. The UN has said that some residents remain trapped in a rugged and open area on a nearby mountain that has been surrounded by militants.

The issue was hotly debated in Parliament at the beginning of the week. During the discussion, Sinan Oğan, a deputy from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), stated that the government is not allowing Turkmens without passports to seek refuge in Turkey. In stark contrast, as was noted by Oğan, Turkey does not demand to see the passports of hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing civil war when they arrive at the border.

Sharply criticizing the government, Oğan said: “[Turkmens] say: 'I am also Turkish [and] Muslim. I will come if you open the border.' Why are you closing the border to Turkmens? Are they to blame because they are Turkmens? If they were Arabs, you would have immediately opened the border.”

“Why won't you open the border when Turkmens are being slaughtered there [on the other side of the border]?” Oğan added, and he challenged ruling party deputies to speak out if his remarks were untrue. None of the ruling party deputies disputed Oğan's comments.

Yunus finds it hard to understand why Turkey asks to see fleeing Turkmens' passports, as most Turkmen do not have passports. Most of the people who have been internally displaced in Iraq over the last two months have taken refuge in the Kurdish region. According to Kurdish officials they currently host 1.5 million displaced people. There are not enough camps for the number of refugees, a significant number of whom are Turkmens, and many have no choice but to live in tents or in the open under the cruel summer sun.

Turkmens seeking refuge in the Kurdish region have not received a warm welcome from the Kurdish government and are reportedly barred from going to Kurdish cities such as Arbil.

“We do not want to stay in the Kurdish region because we are not treated well by the Kurds,” Yunus confirmed. “If Kurds do not want to host us [in their region], then they should let us leave and establish a corridor to the Turkish border,” he suggested, hoping that the few Turkmens with a passport would be able to come to Turkey.

After capturing Mosul in June, the IS also seized towns in the surrounding area, where thousands of Turkmens live. Turkmens then fled to the mountains and the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq that borders Mosul province.

Following their expansion into Mosul in mid-June, the IS seized Tal Afar, a city with a population of nearly 400,000 people in northwestern Iraq, the majority of whom are Turkmens.

An aid worker from Kimse Yok Mu (Is Anybody There?) who, during one of his trips to transport aid to Turkmens, had the chance to get information about the Turkmens fleeing the IS occupation of Tal Afar, said Turkmens do not feel safe and just want to get into Turkish territory.

Before Sinjar, a city in northwestern Iraq near the Syrian border, was captured by the IS, Turkmens fleeing the attack on Tal Afar wanted to take refuge in Sinjar. But the Kurdish peshmerga forces controlling the city did not allow the Turkmens to enter the city, which is under the KRG's administration.

Kimse Yok Mu's aid worker, who asked to remain anonymous, said that Turkmen from the Sinjar area had told him that Turkmen had not received all the humanitarian aid sent by Turkey as the aid was distributed by peshmerga forces. "I was told that there are no doctors in the camps where they are kept and their children don't have access to proper medical care," the aid worker told Sunday's Zaman, adding that Turkmen had said, "Take us to Turkey, we want nothing more than that."

Having done nothing other than send humanitarian aid to the Turkmen, Turkey is at long last now preparing to establish a campsite for displaced Turkmen near the Turkish border in Iraq.

Turkmen representatives called on Turkey to mobilize the UN to establish a safe zone in northern Iraq where Turkmen would be protected against the threat of the IS. The calls apparently fell on deaf ears in Turkey, and Erşad Salihi, the leader of the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), submitted a petition to Nikolay Mladenov, a UN representative in Iraq at the beginning of the week. The petition reiterated the request for a UN safe zone in areas populated by Turkmen in Iraq.

During the US occupation of Saddam-era Iraq in the early 1990s, a US-led coalition imposed a buffer zone in northern Iraq to protect Kurds from potential attacks by the Iraqi army.

Noting that Turkmen have been the biggest victims of the IS terrorist attacks, Salihi told the Doğan news agency in Kirkuk: "The land populated by Turkmen is on its way to being depopulated. We are sandwiched between the two sides. Either the armed groups will seize our land or we will, in cooperation with peshmerga [Kurdish military] forces, fight against the armed groups."

Salihi noted that, unlike the Kurds, Turkmen do not have an armed unit of their own and that he is making these calls on the UN because the Turkmen's survival is being jeopardized by the swift advance of the IS.

Like the MHP, the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has also criticized the government for ignoring the plight of Turkmen.

Faruk Loğoğlu, deputy chairman of the CHP told Sunday's Zaman: "In terms of humanitarian law and morals and [because] Turkmen are our kinfolk, it is completely the wrong attitude to close the borders to Turkmen. The AK Party [Justice and Development Party] has been insensitive to the plight of Turkmen [in Iraq]. It has left Turkmen to their own devices," he added.

Professor Suphi Saatçi, a Kirkuk-born scholar from Mimar Sinan University, recently said that Turkey was refusing entry to Turkmen fleeing violence in Iraq. Highlighting the conditions that the Turkmen live under while fleeing the extremists, Saatçi said, "They are living under the harsh sun, without shade, food or water and are left to die right under our noses; we are overwhelmed."

Although in recent weeks Turkey seems to have increased the amount of humanitarian aid sent to Iraq for Turkmen and others facing threats from the IS, many Turkmen children have died due to heat exposure, diarrhea, malnutrition, thirst and scorpion stings while struggling to stay alive in desert areas where they have had to settle. Many children and their parents are living in extremely unhealthy conditions, sleeping in the open air when they cannot find a place in refugee camps and tent cities, and thus have no access to services or food.

Turkmen in Iraq are disappointed by the government's insensitivity to their plight.

"Turkey has not backed us politically. This is what saddens us most," Riyaz Sarıkahya, a Kirkuk-based leader of the Turkmeneli Party, told Sunday's Zaman.

Although expressing his gratitude for the humanitarian aid Turkey has been sending to Turkmen, Sarıkahya said: "Turkey has not submitted petitions to any international organizations regarding the security of Turkmen. We are deeply disappointed by that."

50 thousand Assyrians: Report on the flight from Al Hamdaniya

AINA (04.07.2014) - <http://www.aina.org/reports/fta.pdf>

Introduction

On Wednesday, June 25, 2014 at 13:00 a clock clashes broke out between Kurdish militia and armed sunni-arab groups south-west of the Assyrian town Al Hamdaniya in Iraq.

The town is also called Baghdede in Assyrian and Qaraqosh in Turkish; it has approximately 50,000 inhabitants. Al Hamdaniya lies in the southern part of the Nineveh plain, about 20 kilometres southeast of Mosul.

The media coverage of the clashes have conveyed a story in which the Islamic group ISIS have tried to attack the town because the inhabitants are Christians and that Kurdish militia have responded in defence of the civilian population.

The Assyrian Federation of Sweden was informed about the clashes through contacts on the ground one hour after they broke out. Contacts have been ongoing on a daily basis with different sources in the mentioned area in Iraq and in other parts of the country since then in order to gather information. Information obtained from one source has been verified with another independent source. After analysing all the information received the Assyrian Federation draws totally different conclusions about the event than what has been reported in the media.

In order not to expose the sources on the ground their identities are kept secret.

Södertälje, 1 July 2014
The Assyrian Federation of Sweden
Afram Yakoub, President

Background

The Nineveh plain is an oval shaped area in the northern part of Iraq with an estimated land area of 3500 square kilometres. It is made up of four administrative units; Al Hamdaniya (named after main town), Tell Keif, Sheikan and Al Shekhan. The area is delineated by the river Tigris to the west, the river Great Zab to the south, a smaller river to the east and a mountain ridge to the north. The fertile plain is part of what is known as the Iraqi breadbasket.

The Nineveh plain is unique in terms of ethnic demographics as two non- Muslim peoples form the majority of the inhabitants. These are Assyrians and Yezidis. Another minority in inhabiting the plain are the Shabak, who are Muslim.

The Nineveh plain is the last area in Iraq where non-Muslims are the majority. It is special also because Assyrians and Yezidis are the indigenous population of Iraq. The ruins of the ancient Assyrian capital Nineveh lie there. In no other middle eastern country (with the exception of the Maronites in Lebanon) has the non-Muslim indigenous population been able to maintain a demographic majority in a coherent area.

Since the American war in Iraq in 2003 the Assyrians and Yezidis have raised demands for the Nineveh plain to become a self-administered area within the federal system of the Iraqi constitution. The purpose is to allow for the minorities living there to have greater influence over their security and administration, and to be able to exercise their religions, cultures and languages freely.

The Kurdish administered region in Northern Iraq was quick to lay claim to the area and sent in its militia when the Saddam regime fell. The Nineveh plain has been designated as a "disputed area" since then as a result of the Kurdish military presence. According to the Iraqi constitution a referendum shall be held in "disputed areas" in order to decide if they will answer to the central government in Baghdad or the KRG. It should be noted that very few Kurds live in the Nineveh plain.

On January 21, 2014 the Iraqi council of ministers took a decision to make the Nineveh plain into a province. An investigation began in order to study the feasibility of the plan, which is supposed to have final approval by the parliament in Baghdad. The decision of the council of ministers made many Assyrians, Yezidis and Shabak hopeful about their future.

On June 10, 2014 year Islamic groups under the leadership of ISIS took over the city of Mosul and the Iraqi army and police collapsed, including on the Nineveh plain. Kurdish militia was suddenly the only armed force in the area.

Course of events

Preparations

Unanimous sources make clear that the number of Kurdish militia known as Zerevani increased in and around the check point area south west of Al Hamdaniya on Tuesday, June 24, one day before any clashes were reported. The first Zerevani militiamen had arrived to the area as soon as Mosul fell to ISIS. During this day, June 24, a rumour made the rounds in town that ISIS would attack the next day. This increased the fear among the already terrified civilians who had witnessed the arrival of ISIS to nearby Mosul some two weeks earlier.

Provocation

The Kurdish militia was digging trenches in the area for several days with the help of bulldozers. Sometime during Wednesday, June 25, the Zerevani militia ordered all armed persons manning the check point to leave the area. Several independent sources have stated clashes broke out sometime around midday when the bulldozers entered lands belonging to a Sunni Arab village. This provoked the villagers and led to armed clashes between the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds.

Clashes

The Sunnis soon called on ISIS and other armed groups in nearby Mosul for support. The fighting escalated into artillery battle. At 13:00 PM the news reached the town of Al Hamdaniya. Given the rumour ISIS has acquired as a ruthless Islamic extremist group the people in the town panicked. The rumour that was spread the day before about an imminent attack by ISIS added fear. The civilians soon began to hear the grenades

exploding not far from the town. People began to leave the town immediately. A mass exodus began which led to 50,000 people leaving their homes within 24 hours. Two grenades fell only a few meters from the houses on the outskirts of the town. Heavily armed Kurdish militia was sent to the area and it positioned itself around the town.

Negotiations

The Assyrian Catholic bishop, Youhana Boutros Moshe refused to leave Al Hamdaniya. He stayed, along with his secretary, and a dozen young men who wanted to defend the churches. The relations between the Assyrians and the Sunni Arab tribes in the area are good and the two sides know each other well. That is why the Arabs initiated contact with the bishop and his secretary. The Sunnis offered the Kurds a truce through the bishop. They assured the bishop that they were not targeting the Assyrians but the Kurds who have provoked them by entering their lands.

The commanders of the Kurdish militia said they would not accept a truce. They informed the bishop to tell the Sunni Arabs that they must leave Al Hamdaniya district in order for the shelling to stop.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn by the Assyrian federation based upon the facts the organisation has gathered offer a totally different picture from the one presented by the media.

Not an Attack by ISIS

What the sources reveal first and foremost is that this was not an attack by ISIS against the city of Al Hamdaniya or the Nineveh plain. Neither ISIS or any of the armed groups who have taken over Mosul were behind the attack. The information points however to involvement by ISIS or other armed groups aiding the Sunni Arab tribes shortly after the clashes broke out.

Intentional Provocation

Sources on the ground reveal the attack was provoked by the Kurdish militia. Given the situation in the area after the takeover of ISIS and the chaos in the entire country, the Kurdish militia leaders must have known that their actions would provoke a resistance by the Sunni Arabs who live in that area.

Intelligence points to the Kurds knowing the consequences and indeed preparing for them by increasing the number of Zerevani militia in the mentioned area south west of Al Hamdaniya the day before clashes broke out. Sending away the men manning the check points in the area shortly before the fight could be interpreted as a way to avoid direct witnesses. Many of the men in charge of the check points were inhabitants of Al Hamdaniya.

Intended Evacuation

The positioning of Kurdish militia and artillery around the town of Al Hamdaniya points to a conscious strategy to scare the inhabitants of the town. By deploying their units close to the town the Kurds effectively made Al Hamdaniya a target of enemy shelling. Common military sense is to engage the enemy as far away as possible from a town with tens of thousands of civilians. This conduct by the Kurdish militia has been openly critiqued by Mr. Yonadam Kanna, secretary general of the Assyrian Democratic Movement and head of the Al Rafidain slate in the Iraqi parliament. The following is an excerpt from a news item in Iraqi Media Network on 28 June:

"The leader of the Al Rafidain slate Yonadam Kanna said today that the areas of the minorities in Mosul have been transformed into a battle field between Peshmerga, the tribes and the terrorist gangs of ISIS. He urges the KRG to pull back the Peshmerga so that the areas of the minorities will not become targets for the terrorist gangs of ISIS."

The rumour spread the day before clashes broke out about an imminent attack by ISIS is yet another indication of an intentional strategy aimed at scaring away the civilian population.

Another prominent member of the Assyrian community has hinted at Kurdish manipulation. Gevara Zaya, deputy general secretary of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, was quoted on June 28 in the online magazine ankawa.com under the headline: "Military strategy by Zerevani forces contributes to general exodus from Al Hamdaniya and Karamlesh.

See full report with pictures at <http://www.aina.org/reports/fta.pdf>

Hammer and anvil

The country's Turkoman has suffered disproportionately among the displaced populations in Iraq, writes Nermeen Al-Mufti in Baghdad

Al Ahram (04.07.2014) - The media in general is running after the news of the clashes in Iraq, with each outlet covering the recent confrontations in the way that declares its agenda and its funder's interests. There are not enough reports regarding the humanitarian situation, especially the situation of those who the ongoing war has forced to leave their homes.

Many painful stories are going around among people who are trying to help the displaced. The stories of the Turkomans' displacements have been particularly painful because they feel alone in the midst of their tragedy, being caught between a rock and a hard place.

In Kirkuk, the oil-rich northern city that has become the most valuable piece of the Iraqi cake for many internal and external powers, there are displaced Turkoman families from Tel Afer (Mosul), Bashir, a village south of Kirkuk, and the villages of Birawchili, Chardagli and Karanaz (Salaheddin). There are also many Arab families from Mosul, Ramadi and Fallujah.

There are no sectarian disputes, since the families, Sunni and Shia, have all been forced by the war and violence to leave their homes.

The displaced have asked that the place they have gathered in not be mentioned, and they are afraid of what could happen were they to be discovered. The names of those talked to by Al-Ahram Weekly are not their real names, as false names are being used for protection.

Jalila, 36, from the village of Bashir about 20 km south of Kirkuk has not been able to forget the night 10 days ago when her village was attacked. Her husband went out where the other men of the village were gathered. All the inhabitants of the village are Turkomans, and the village was also totally destroyed in the 1980s.

Jalila hardly recalls those years, but she remembers every single moment of the night they were attacked and she lost her husband. "He asked me to take the kids, our two

daughters and one son, the eldest is 12 years old. I walked with the other women for more than three hours to reach the town of Taza about 15 km south of Kirkuk and by the morning we had reached the city itself."

"By the afternoon I had heard that my husband and another 25 men had been killed." The bodies were only sent to their families after four days. Jalila's youngest daughter, Shangul, four, started crying when a car stopped and three men walked towards them. Jalila hugged her daughter, tears in her eyes, not knowing what to say. One of the men said that they were from the same neighbourhood where the displaced were from and that they had brought food and water for them. "My kids and other children feel afraid of every stranger," Jalila said. The families refuse to be visited or helped, as they are afraid that somebody might find them and attack them again.

In the same place there was a family from Fallujah. Ahmed, the father, a young Turkoman, spoke to the Weekly. During prayers, he revealed that he was a Shia. Knowing that we were Sunni, he said that "in the real Iraq there are no differences among us. Only the politicians are trying to deepen sectarian disputes because they could not continue their political lives if they quit playing on sectarian problems."

Abu Hayder, a Turkoman from the village of Birawchili, seemed as if he had not slept for days. Tears in his eyes, he said that he missed his home, adding that "my brother-in-law is a Sunni Turkoman. Before 2003, we never thought to ask anyone about his sect." The men who had attacked his village, he said, had not allowed them to take anything with them.

"Iraq is large and kind to bear with us," he said. "But we will never find words to express what we have been through."

About 250 Turkoman families from Tel Afer reached Tuz Khormatu 75 km south of Kirkuk. There are more than 300 km between Tel Aher and Tuz Khormatu. They first left for Sinjar, and then, following hard roads, they reached Kirkuk, with many proceeding to Tuz Khormatu.

Yildrim, a father of nine children, said that "we stayed in Sinjar for many days without having even a tent. Our kids began sleeping under the cars to find shelter. We did not receive any help or aid. No one visited us, and we had to leave everything behind."

More than 700 Turkoman families reached Kirkuk. Six hundred Turkoman families from the towns of Delli Abbas and Al-Jabal east of Diyala reached the town of Qara Tepe. In a phone call with the Weekly, a local man, Metin Bayatli, said that "we opened our houses to them. There are two families in my house alone." The Turkomans of Qara Tepe are mostly Shia, and the displaced Turkomans coming there are mostly Sunni.

The Turkomans, the third-largest ethnic group in Iraq, have been undergoing change for decades, Arabisation before 2003 and Kurdification afterwards. All their towns were put under Article 140, which expired in 2007, of the Iraqi constitution that links them to the disputed areas related to the Kurdish Regional Government, Kirkuk among them.

The Turkomans say that Kirkuk is their capital. On 10 June, Kurdish Peshmergas entered Kirkuk, and Kurdish President Masoud Barzani declared that Article 140 of the Constitution would apply and the Kurds would not now leave Kirkuk.

According to the London Financial Times, "Turkey's ruling party has signalled it is ready to accept an independent Kurdish state in what is now northern Iraq, marking a historic shift by one of the heavyweight powers of the Middle East."

"In the past an independent Kurdish state was a reason for war [for Turkey] but no one has the right to say this now," Hussein Celik, spokesman for the ruling Turkish AK Party, told the paper.

This statement came after Barzani's declaration, making the Turkomans feel even more alone. According to Turhan Ketene, an independent Turkoman politician, "in the last few years the AKP government has interfered in many Arab countries' internal affairs. The results have shown that it has been wrong to do so. Kirkuk and northern Iraq is part of Iraq and the Iraqis will fight for unity."

For Ketene, Iran has also been following the situation closely, though Iran does not support a Kurdish state because it knows that the Kurds, Azeris and Arabs who are part of Iran could start working for their own independence. Turkey, on the other hand, may think that its own Kurds could settle in an independent Kurdish state, ridding it of the problem.

Until the present crisis is resolved in Iraq, the Turkomans will remain between a rock and a hard place. For the time being, the Turkomans and other displaced people will continue to look forward to going back to their towns and villages and waiting for local and international NGOs to help them.

Further reading

Fleeing Shiite Turkmen caught in Iraq limbo

Kurdish authorities have blocked those fleeing the conflict in northern Iraq from entering the autonomous region without a resident sponsor.

They have also barred them from the regional capital Arbil entirely, meaning they cannot get to the airport to fly south.

http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/fleeing-shiite-turkmen-caught-in-iraq-limbo_944565.html

Kurds selling guns left behind by Iraqi forces in the streets of Kirkuk

As the Iraqi army's <http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20140701/its-time-to-buy-a-gun-in-kirkuk-video> northern command disintegrated in the face of a swift advance by Al Qaeda-inspired militants two weeks ago, Kurdish security forces moved in — and arms dealers did too

<http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20140701/its-time-to-buy-a-gun-in-kirkuk-video>

The Fall of Tal Afar and the Situation of Turkmen

Bilgay Duman, ORSAM Middle East Researchers

<http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/showArticle.aspx?ID=2652>

ISIL kidnaps Shia Turkmen, destroys shrines: HRW

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/104980/World/Region/ISIL-kidnaps-Shia-Turkmen,-destroys-shrines-HRW.aspx>

Iraqi Turkmen leader slams Kurdish invasion of Kirkuk

<http://www.worldbulletin.net/world/139664/afghans-march-against-election-fraud-in-kabul>

Northern Iraq (articles) Turkmen kidnapped by ISIS in Iraq and Barzani declaration on Kirkuk

<http://turkmenfriendship.blogspot.be/2014/06/turkmens-kidnapped-by-isis-in-iraq-and.html>

At least 40 Shia Turkmen kidnapped by ISIS

Forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) kidnapped at least 40 Shia Turkmen, dynamited four Shia places of worship, and ransacked homes and farms in two Shia villages bordering the Iraqi city of Mosul, Human Rights Watch said today. The assaults took place during a violent three-day spree that began on June 23, 2014.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/27/iraq-isis-kidnaps-shia-turkmen-destroys-shrines>

Assyrian NGO, Christian Solidarity International aiding Iraqis fleeing Mosul, Baghdede

AINA (03.07.2014) / <http://www.aina.org/news/20140702212919.htm> - The Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (HHRO) formed a Joint Relief Team with Christian Solidarity International (CSI) and visited the displaced families from Mosul and Baghdede (Qaraqosh). They distributed relief aide, including food baskets, milk and infant formula, household items and other essential needs.

Mr. Louis Marques, Vice President of the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (HHRO), and Mr. William Warda, Public Relations Officer, and a number HHRO members contributed to the relief efforts.

HHRO expressed its commitment to make available all its capabilities and resources in partnering with Iraqi humanitarian organizations and international relief organizations to assist the displaced families.

HHRO is recognized for providing aid and relief to all Iraqi families irrespective of their religion, sect or nation.

HHRO is a NGO based in Baghdad, Iraq. It monitors the human rights situation in Iraq, particularly of minorities such as Assyrians, Turkmen, Yazidis and Shabak. Founded in 2005, HHRO works for human rights observation and documentation, in addition to implementation of humanitarian relief in Iraq.

HHRO works with various Iraqi and international institutions on variety of issues.

HHRO publishes annual reports on Human Rights situations focusing on Minorities. In 2013, HHRO was recognized and awarded as the best NGO by the United States State Department for its major achievements in the most difficult situations for the year 2012 in Baghdad.

Christians displaced again by Iraqi violence

Thousands of Christians have fled from Mosul to Iraqi Kurdistan after ISIS took control of the city.

By Shaida al-Ameen

Al-Monitor (03.07.2014) / <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iraq-christians-displaced-mosul-isis-crisis.html#> - An estimated 10,000 Christians have been displaced from the Nineveh plains to Iraqi Kurdistan during the past few days as a result of raids by the Islamic State, formerly the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), surrounding the majority-Christian Hamdaniyah district. Al-Monitor has confirmed that shelters for displaced persons have been opened in the town of Ainkawa, in Erbil province.

Tamara Jirjees, who fled ISIS attacks with her four children, told Al-Monitor: "We heard the thud of strong blasts that shook our region, and my kids broke out in tears and cries of fear. We took our things and escaped to the Iraqi Kurdistan region." She further stated, "We reached the checkpoint in Erbil in the evening, and many people were fleeing. It took us a long time to enter the province. The Kurdistan Regional Government opened schools to shelter us and offered us food and water. A representative of the church also visited us and helped us."

Ainkawa Mayor Jalal Habib told Al-Monitor, "Ten thousand Christian citizens were displaced to Ainkawa in the past few days, and 20 schools and youth centers were turned into shelters to accommodate them. Moreover, the Barzani Charity Foundation, UNHCR [UN High Commissioner for Refugees] and UNICEF ... in addition to several other civil associations have provided humanitarian aid to the displaced."

After the 2003 US-led invasion and occupation and the subsequent rise of extremist Shiite and Sunni organizations, acts of violence against Christians increased in Iraq. The most violent attacks that targeted Christians occurred on Aug. 1, 2004, with the simultaneous bombing of five churches in Baghdad and Mosul.

The violence has since expanded to target liquor stores, clothing stores and beauty salons — most of which are owned by Christians — with the aim of shutting them down. Music shops have also come under attack. Moreover, Christian women have been threatened if they fail to cover their heads like Muslims. A number of abductions and assassinations of Christian clerics have also been reported.

Romeo Hakari, general secretary of the Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party, which represents Iraqi Christians' interests, told Al-Monitor: "The regions inhabited by Christians are located between the hammer and the anvil of the federal government and the Iraqi Kurdistan region, although the latter offered some services during the past two years to these regions. The task of taking care of the affected regions is the responsibility of the federal government and the Nineveh Provincial Council, which has not offered any real services in the past."

Hakari said, "The Iraqi Kurdistan region specifically has to take care of these areas," citing the inhabitants' feeling that Iraqi Kurdistan is their safe haven. "Fortunately, there weren't any casualties in the wake of the raids. However, fear of arbitrary raids and attacks from the terrorist ISIS and other militias on their regions pushed thousands of Christians to flee to the Iraqi Kurdistan region. We tried to stop the wave of displacements, but fear has taken hold of the citizens and driven them out of their regions."

In explaining the current plight of Iraq's Christians, Hakari said, "We blame the federal government for our suffering because it has not fulfilled its constitutional and legal duties in protecting all segments of the Iraqi people, especially the Chaldeans, Syrians and Assyrians." He asserted, "The Iraqi constitution was unjust with us. It did not consolidate the rights of our people, as we had demanded in our capacity as their representatives."

Hakari underlined that people feel that there are no guaranteed rights or equality in Iraq. He stated: "Marginalization has bred a feeling of injustice in Iraq. This feeling has been around since the establishment of the Iraqi state."

Expressing sentiments similar to Hakari's, Salem Touma, an independent Christian politician, told Al-Monitor, "Fighting did not reach Hamdaniyah, but the lack of services like water and electricity in the region has annoyed people. The wave of fear has also overcome the citizens due to the mortars that fell south of the region. The displacement of Christians from Iraq started after 2004." He added, "We were around two million Christians before 2003, and now the number has decreased to around only half a million."

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iraq-christians-displaced-mosul-isis-crisis.html#ixzz37R3DRx3c>

Translator(s) Pascale Menassa

Turmoil in Iraq: Turning a blind eye to PM Maliki's tactics will only cause more instability

By David Kilgour

Yahoo News Canada (27.06.2014) - The escalating violence across Iraq, including beheadings, is horrific and heartbreaking.

What are some underlying realities?

Iraq and its current borders emerged from the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. As with their carving up of the African continent a generation earlier, unwitting colonial powers ignored cultural and sectarian differences, most notably in the Middle East the centuries-old Sunni-Shia conflict.

The insurgents of the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) are fanatics from the deeply mistreated yet mostly responsible and non-violent regional Sunni minority. Sunnis accuse Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of mass murder, blatant discrimination to favour Shias, and acting more like a criminal gang than a government during eight years in power. No matter how maliciously Maliki governed, he maintained the support of U.S. President Barack Obama.

In recent days, ISIS has used similarly barbaric tactics to rout Maliki's forces. However, the bulk of the resistance is coming from tribal leaders and moderate Sunnis and Shias who can no longer tolerate the Maliki regime, dominated by Iran's mullahs.

Struan Stevenson, president of the European Parliament delegation for relations with Iraq, former prime minister of Algeria Sid Ahmed Ghozali, former vice-president of the European Parliament Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca, and other credible persons presented inconvenient truths at a press conference recently in Brussels:

Maliki and Iran's paramilitary Qods Force operating in Iraq are the causes of much violence across Iraq. With the final withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2011, Tehran filled the vacuum. The press conference group described the support of Western governments for Maliki as "shameful," saying they share responsibility for various massacres, and called for an end to U.S. and Russian arms being supplied to Maliki.

Iraqi events affect the entire region: If Iraq's government was not dominated by Iran, Assad in Syria would be ousted by now. The survival of the Tehran regime also depends on Assad and Maliki support, so Tehran's terrorists are now killing non-Shias in both their countries.

Representatives of a range of Iraqi political parties say that the recent elections were neither free nor fair. Maliki, using intimidation, threats and bribes, is desperately still seeking to become prime minister for a third term.

Residents of six Sunni-majority provinces in Iraq have staged peaceful sit-ins since late 2012, protesting widespread repression and executions. They were attacked by the Iraqi military. These attacks constitute war crimes; the international community should condemn them.

Western governments and others who helped topple Saddam Hussein and then empowered Maliki bear much responsibility for the current situation. The Obama administration has remained silent about Maliki's atrocities against Iraqi citizens, particularly the Sunni population and other minorities.

Finally, the Brussels press conference stressed that Iraq's crisis can only be resolved by ousting Maliki, combined with the complete eviction of Iran's operatives from Iraq, and through the creation of a democratic national government representing all segments of Iraqi society.

The Obama wall of silence extends to foreign refugees inside Iraq, including 2800 Iranian dissidents remaining in Camp Liberty, who have each been promised protection by the United States. Earlier, 52 members of this group, then in Camp Ashraf, were photographed by survivors being systematically murdered by Maliki's elite troops. US State Department officers later told Congress, "There is no evidence the Iraqi government was involved in the Ashraf Massacre."

Iraq's third largest community, six million Kurds, has been one of its most responsible. Five months ago, it warned that Iraqi Sunnis were ready to revolt, but were ignored. Their army, the Peshmerga militia, is highly-respected and tough. Their government is considered honest, tolerant and competent. The Kurds themselves are mostly Sunnis, but tend to define themselves more through their ethnicity and language than by religion.

An estimated 400,000 Christians remain in Iraq following the waves of persecution directed at them since 2003. About a million have fled, some taking refuge in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Erbil, where they are being protected by the Kurdish militia. The targeted religious cleansing of Christians, Nina Shea of Freedom House properly stresses, is a crime against humanity, which "never received much attention by either President Bush or President Obama's administrations."

Now is the time for persons of good will everywhere to speak up for the many peaceful Iraqi citizens: Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Christians, Jews, Arabs, and others. All deserve to be part of a new government in Iraq.

If the US administration is seen to join with Maliki and Iran to attack these aggrieved Iraqis, it would reverberate throughout the Middle East and further destabilize the region.

Unless sectarian differences can be overcome peacefully, there is little hope for stability in Iraq. The first step forward is Maliki's departure.

David Kilgour is co-chair of the Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran and a director of the Washington-based Council for a Community of Democracies (CCD). He is a former MP for both the Conservative and Liberal Parties in the south-east region of Edmonton and has also served as the Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa, Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific and Deputy Speaker of the House.

Iraq's use of the death penalty increases, with 169 killed in 2013

The National (31.12.2013) - Iraq's use of the death penalty has increased despite international condemnation, with some fearing execution rates could rise further as officials seek to appear tough on security ahead of elections.

At least 169 people were put to death in 2013, by far the country's highest such figure since the 2003 United States-led invasion, and one that puts it third in the world, behind just China and Iran.

Iraqi officials insist capital punishment is both sanctioned by Islam and an effective way to curb violence, despite the fact that this year's executions have had no visible effect on the worst protracted surge in bloodshed since 2008.

Diplomats and human rights groups calling for a moratorium meanwhile point to major problems with Iraq's security forces and within the criminal justice system.

"What is more disturbing than the fact of the use of the death penalty itself ... is the fact that the utter dysfunction of the criminal justice system means that there is a very high likelihood that the people who are being executed are innocent," said Erin Evers, Iraq researcher for New York-based Human Rights Watch.

"Not just trials, but the entire security system from the moment of arrest right through the trials. It's both inadequacy of investigations, in terms of lack of professionalism, lack of collection of evidence, to corruption within the security apparatus, and between the security officers and the judiciary."

Those sentenced to death are usually hanged, often in groups.

Seven people were put to death in December, bringing the overall number for 2013 to 169.

A total of 129 people were executed in 2012.

The United Nations human rights chief, Navi Pillay, has said that Iraq's justice system is "not functioning adequately".

And the US state department said in its 2012 Human Rights Report that "credible accounts of abuse and torture during arrest and investigation, in pretrial detention, and after conviction, particularly by police and army, were common."

But the Iraq justice minister, Hassan Al Shammari, has insisted that executions are carried out only after an exhaustive legal process.

Iraq's human rights ministry has also voiced approval, arguing that carrying out the death penalty acts as a deterrent and will help promote human rights in the long term.

"The Iraqi government has a fixed and clear stance for implementation of the death penalty against those who are found guilty because it is a deterrent to criminals and terrorists who kill Iraqis every day," said the human rights minister, Mohammed Al Sudani.

Iraq executes 42 for mass killings and other 'terrorism' offenses

Washington Post (11.10.2013) - Iraq executed 42 people, including a woman, this week for mass killings and other "terrorism" offenses, the Justice Ministry and the United Nations said Thursday after a surge in sectarian violence.

The U.N. mission in Iraq said it was concerned about the executions, which took place Tuesday and Wednesday, and Amnesty International described the news as "extremely alarming."

Both urged Baghdad to immediately suspend the death penalty, which rights groups say has been used with increasing frequency by Iraqi authorities in recent years.

Sixty-eight death sentences were carried out in 2011, according to Amnesty.

The 42 hanged this week amounted to almost a third of the total number Amnesty said were put to death in all of 2012, when Iraq ranked third in a list of countries that carried out the most executions, behind China and Iran.

More than 6,000 people have been killed in attacks across Iraq this year, as a Sunni Islamist insurgency that includes attacks by al-Qaeda's Iraq branch gains momentum.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the U.S.-led interim authority suspended the death penalty, citing its use as a tool of repression under dictator Saddam Hussein, who left behind mass graves filled with thousands of bodies.

But as sectarian carnage began to take hold of the country in 2005, Iraq reinstated the punishment for those who commit "terrorist acts," as well as people who provoke, plan, finance and enable others to perpetrate them.

Resolution of the European Parliament on recent violence

European Parliament (10.10.2013) -

European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2013 on recent violence in Iraq (2013/2874(RSP))

The European Parliament ,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Iraq, notably that of 14 March 2013 on 'Iraq: the plight of minority groups, including the Iraqi Turkmen'⁽¹⁾ ,
- having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Iraq, of the other part, and to its resolution of 17 January 2013 on the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement⁽²⁾ ,
- having regard to the Commission's Joint Strategy Paper for Iraq (2011-2013),
- having regard to the 'Report on Human Rights in Iraq: January to June 2012', presented jointly by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 19 December 2012,
- having regard to the International Crisis Group's Middle East Report N°144 of 14 August 2013 entitled 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State'
- having regard to the UN casualty figures for September, released on 1 October 2013,
- having regard to the statement of 29 July 2013 by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, urging leaders to pull Iraq 'back from the brink',
- having regard to the statement of 1 September 2013 by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the tragic events in Camp Ashraf which killed 52 people,
- having regard to the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief,
- having regard to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iraq is a party,
- having regard to the statement of 5 September 2013 by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, on the recent violence in Iraq,
- having regard to Rules 122(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas Iraq continues to face serious political, security and socioeconomic challenges, and whereas its political scene is extremely fragmented and plagued by violence and sectarian politics, to the severe detriment of the legitimate aspirations of the Iraqi people for peace, prosperity and a genuine transition to democracy;

B. whereas, according to casualty figures released by the UNAMI, a total of 979 Iraqis were killed, and another 2 133 wounded, in acts of terrorism and violence in September 2013; whereas Baghdad was the worst-affected governorate in September 2013, with 1 429 civilian casualties (418 killed and 1 011 injured), followed by Ninewa, Diyala, Salahuddin and Anbar; whereas Kirkuk, Erbil, Babil, Wasit, Dhi-Qar and Basra also reported casualties;

C. whereas the impact of violence on civilians remains disturbingly high and is still growing, with up to 5 000 civilians having been killed, and up to 10 000 injured, since the beginning of 2013 – the highest figure in the last five years;

D. whereas serious social and economic problems – widespread poverty, high unemployment, economic stagnation, environmental degradation and a lack of basic

public services – continue to affect a large proportion of the population; whereas numerous peaceful demonstrations demanding more social, economic and political rights continue to result in very systematic repression by the security forces, carried out with impunity;

E. whereas the Iraqi constitution guarantees equality before the law for all citizens, along with the 'administrative, political, cultural and educational rights of the various nationalities';

F. whereas the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, in particular its human rights clause, emphasises that the EU-Iraq political dialogue should focus on human rights and strengthening democratic institutions;

1. Strongly condemns the recent acts of terrorism and heightened sectarian violence, which carries the danger that the country will fall back into sectarian strife and is generating fears of wider sectarian conflict across the region; points out that although violence occurs along sectarian lines, its causes are political rather than religious;

2. Extends its condolences to the families and friends of the deceased and injured;

3. Condemns the recent attacks of: 3 September 2013, in which at least 60 people were killed in mainly Shia districts of Baghdad; 15 September 2013, in which more than 40 people were killed in blasts across Iraq, mostly targeting Shia areas; 21 September 2013, in which at least 60 people were killed at a funeral in Sadr City, Baghdad; 30 September 2013, in which at least 54 people were killed in car bomb blasts in mainly Shia areas of Baghdad; 5 October 2013, in which at least 51 people were killed and more than 70 injured in an attack in Baghdad by a suicide bomber targeting Shia pilgrims in the al-Adhamiya district, while at least 12 people were killed and at least 25 others wounded when another suicide bomber struck a café in Balad, north of Baghdad, on the same day; 6 October 2013, in which at least 12 children aged between 6 and 12 were killed, and many more injured, by a suicide bomber who struck next to a primary school in the Shia Turkmen village of Qabak; 7 October 2013, in which at least 22 people were killed in a fresh wave of explosions in Baghdad; and 8 October 2013, in which at least 9 people were killed by a car bomb in Baghdad and attacks on security forces in the north of the country;

4. Strongly condemns the attack on Camp Ashraf of 1 September 2013 by Iraqi forces, in which 52 Iranian refugees were killed, and 7 residents abducted, including 6 women who, as stated by Vice-President / High Representative Catherine Ashton, are believed to be held in Baghdad, and calls for their immediate and unconditional release; expresses its support for the work of the UNAMI, which is trying to relocate the 3 000 or so residents outside of Iraq;

5. Expresses its grave concern over the new surge of instability and calls on all Iraqi political leaders, from all ethnic and religious backgrounds, to work together to put an end to sectarian violence and distrust and to bring the Iraqi people together;

6. Calls on both the Government of Iraq and the regional governments to condemn the attacks and to facilitate a full and swift independent international investigation into the recent terrorist attacks in the region, and calls on the Iraqi Government to cooperate fully with that investigation in order to bring those responsible to justice;

7. Is concerned about the spill-over of violence from the conflict in Syria to Iraq, where jihadist rebels linked to the Islamic State of Iraq, a Sunni militant umbrella group that includes al-Qaeda, have risen to prominence;

8. Calls, as a matter of urgency, on political, religious and civil leaders and the security forces to start to work together to end the bloodshed and ensure that all Iraqi citizens feel equally protected;

9. Calls on the Iraqi Government and on all political leaders to take the necessary measures to provide security and protection for all people in Iraq, in particular members of vulnerable minorities; calls on the Iraqi Government to ensure that the security forces comply with the rule of law and international standards;

10. Calls on the international community and the EU to support the Iraqi Government by promoting initiatives for national dialogue, consolidation of the rule of law and the provision of basic services, with the goal of creating a secure, stable, unified, prosperous and democratic Iraq, in which the human and political rights of all people are protected;

11. Calls on the Iraqi authorities, given that the security situation has exacerbated problems for more vulnerable groups such as women, youth and fundamental rights activists, including trade unionists, to take urgent action to direct more resources towards programmes aimed at improving the situation;

12. Encourages religious dialogue between Sunni and Shia clerics as a necessary tool for conflict resolution; considers that the recent talks between the US and Iran also afford an opportunity for Iraq to act as a bridge, given that it is one of the few countries to have strong relations with both parties; calls on Iranian leaders to engage constructively in the stabilisation of the region;

13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Council of Representatives of Iraq, the Regional Government of Kurdistan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Federalism can help remedy conflicts in the Middle East, say conference speakers at the European Parliament

By Serena Romeo, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (09.10.2013) - On 2nd October, MEP Tunne Kelam hosted a conference in the European Parliament on federalism in the Middle East as one possible solution to the region's conflicts. The event was organised in collaboration with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) and gave particular focus to Iran and Iraq.

Marino Busdachin, General Secretary of UNPO and moderator of the conference, underlined that federalism is not an easy system to implement, citing that even modern states like Belgium have their own problems to face with their respective federalist systems. In the Middle East, where states and minorities exist with overlapping interests, implementing such a system could nonetheless offer a path toward reconciliation within countries and in the region.

William Spencer from the Institute for International Law and Human Rights compared the different systems of government adopted by European states with the possibility of a federalist system in Iraq. The expressions of federalism in Europe vary from one state to another, depending on which power or which authority has been decentralised. In the case of Iraq, Spencer noted that the country's new constitution has defined its

government as a federal system, which has the potential to mitigate some long-standing conflicts; however, work still needs to be done to provide an adequate legal framework to protect religious and linguistic minorities in Iraq. Even still, such a framework could be useless if state institutions are too weak to guarantee these protections. Federalism can be a first step toward democracy, he said, but it is surely not the final step.

Regarding Iran, Ayda Karimili, spokesperson for the Southern Azerbaijani Alliance, began by outlining the composition of the country's population, where there are several ethnic minorities like Turks, Kurds, Baloch, Turkmen, Arabs and Lors. However, solidarity between the various "nations" of Iran, said Loghman Hazar Ahmedi of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan and member of the Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran (CNFI), is strong only because of their common struggle against discrimination from the regime. According to Loghman Ahmedi, the implementation of a federal system would be positive both for the state and for the security of the Middle East region.

The Government of Iran has been widely criticised for its systematic violations of human rights and brutal repression of its political opponents. On the 26th September, an exchange of views on the human rights situation in Iran took place at the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights, during which a political prisoner described the mistreatment and "psychological rape" he endured in an Iranian prison. In November 2012, the European Parliament passed a Resolution on the situation of ethnic minorities in Iran, highlighting the need to improve the human rights situation there.

The second panel focused on the theoretical concept of federalism. A doctoral researcher at KU Leuven Institute of Philosophy, Michael Jewkes, spoke about the theory of federalism. Nasser Boladai of the Balochistan People's Party discussed how federalism in Iran could be regarded as a solution for the rights of minorities, since minorities are well established in different parts of the Iranian territory. Finally, Ivan Serrano of Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona talked about the implementation of federalism in different European countries in regard to their national minorities.

All in all, the theme of the conference was quite clear: serious consideration of a federal model of government could go a long way toward resolving conflicts in the Middle East. The extent to which sitting governments in the region are prepared to move in this direction – and how to create the political will to do so – are still open for debate.

Baghdad hit by wave of deadly car bombs

BBC News (30.09.2013) - A series of car bomb blasts in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, has killed at least 47 people and injured many more, officials say.

The blasts targeted markets and car parks in mainly Shia Muslim districts of the city.

There has been a recent upsurge in sectarian violence, sparking fears of a return to the bloodletting of 2008.

More than 5,000 people have been killed so far this year, according to United Nations data.

Monday's blasts struck during Baghdad's morning rush hour, with reports of 13 bombs, most of them in Shia neighbourhoods.

Groups of labourers gathering ahead of the working day were among the bombers' targets.

One of the deadliest attacks was reported from the eastern Sadr City district where seven people were killed and 75 injured in a crowded vegetable market.

Another six were reported killed in Shuala, a mainly Shia area of north Baghdad.

The city neighbourhoods affected also included New Baghdad, Habibiya, Sabaa al-Bour, Kazimiya, Shaab and Ur, as well as the Sunni districts of Jamiaa and Ghazaliya, the Associated Press news agency reports.

'War with terrorism'

No-one has claimed responsibility for Monday's attacks, but Sunni Muslim insurgents have been blamed for much of the most recent violence.

The interior ministry accused rebels linked to al-Qaeda of exploiting political divisions and regional conflicts to sow violence.

"Our war with terrorism goes on," interior ministry spokesman Saad Maan told AP.

The recent upsurge in violence was triggered in April by an army raid on a Sunni Muslim anti-government protest camp near Hawija, north of Baghdad.

Many in the country's Sunni Muslim minority complain of being excluded from decision-making and of abuses by the security forces. Recent raids in Baghdad on suspected al-Qaeda hideouts in mainly Sunni districts are thought to have worsened grievances.

One of the bloodiest attacks over the past few weeks was a double bombing in a funeral marquee in Sadr City on 21 September, which left more than 60 people dead.

Several dozen people died in a wave of attacks on Sunday, including another explosion at a funeral.

A suicide bomber attacked a Shia Muslim mosque south of the city, causing the roof to collapse. More than 40 people are now known to have been killed in that incident.

Irbil, the normally stable capital of Iraq's autonomous province of Kurdistan, was hit by a series of bombings on the same day, killing six members of the security services. Officials said that violence could be linked to fighting between jihadists and Kurds in Syria.

Major attacks this month

- **30 September:** At least 42 killed in car bombs in mainly Shia areas of Baghdad
 - **21 September:** At least 60 killed at funeral in Sadr City, Baghdad
 - **15 September:** More than 40 killed in blasts across Iraq mostly targeting Shia areas
 - **3 September:** At least 60 killed in mainly Shia districts of Baghdad
-

Residents of Assyrian town appeal for help against Kurdish government discrimination

AINA (21.09.2013) - Residents of Mangesh, an Assyrian town located in the autonomous Kurdish region in north Iraq, have issued an appeal to the world community, asking for relief from harassment, intimidation and discrimination directed at them by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). According to the letter, the Assyrians of Mangesh are subjected to systematic coercion to support the KRG and are prevented from exercising their civil freedoms and subjected to economic sanctions for failing to support the KRG.

Here's the full text of the letter:

We demand that the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and on behalf of the people of the town of Mangesh, to stop their policies of intimidation in forcing the people of the town to vote for Kurdish supported candidates. We are appealing to civic and Human Rights organizations to put an end to these abuses by the Kurdish Regional Government.

We, the sons and daughters of the town of Mengesh are being harassed by Kurds and their agents in all aspects of our lives, below is a list of their bullying tactics:

1. We can't freely vote for candidates running for political office
2. Our lands are stolen and we are not able to speak out
3. We are not able to join any political party other than Kurdish parties or those parties "owned" by Kurds.
4. We are not able to host any representative from any of our nation's independent political parties.
5. We are not permitted to undertake any activity not sanctioned by the ruling Kurdish party (KDP)
6. We can't form any organization or any cultural center outside the realm of Kurdish control.
7. Any individual that attempts to stay independent or tries to join a political party that is not under Kurdish domination and specifically under the hegemony of the KDP is attacked profusely and even prevented from earning a living.
8. Anyone who doesn't blindly support the policies of the KDP is not able to get a government job.
9. Individuals that don't support the KDP or a political party controlled by the KDP are not able to register their lands in their names.
10. Members of the KDP have formed gangs to terrorize the residents of the town to intimidate them and to have complete control over their lives.
11. They (Kurds) monitor every person's moves and if they become suspicious that a certain individual has any relations with another political party not controlled by them, that person is interrogated and is threatened.

For the above reasons we're appealing to International Human Rights organizations and civil societies to help us stop Kurdish abuses because we have the right to live freely and we also have the right for self determination.

Rosa Mengesh
Steven Khanjaro
Ammo Mammo,
