

IRAQ: Motion at the US Congress to support the “self-determination” of the Nineveh Plain

Agencia Fides (16.09.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2czNYZu> – Twelve members of the US House of Representatives – 9 elected in the Republican Party, and 3 elected in the Democratic Party – presented a resolution to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House to ask the US Congress and the international community to promote the recognition by the Iraqi government of a Province corresponding to the Plain of Nineveh and organized according to legal criteria in line with the “self-determination by indigenous peoples”.

The resolution, presented by Republican Jeff Fortenberry on behalf of his colleagues, is dated September 9, 2016. It introduces and argues the request with a list of 16 considerations, many of which refer to the campaigns carried out in recent months to push the US government and other Western political institutions to apply the definition of “genocide” to the various forms of brutality and oppression carried out by militants of the Islamic Caliphate (Daesh) on Christians and other minority groups.

Among other things, reference is made to the statement of US Secretary of State John Kerry, who after an insistent parliamentary campaign, on March 17 2016 recognized the Islamic State as “responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control, including Yazidis, Christians and Shiite Muslims”. In another passage, the Resolution recalls that “in 2003 in Iraq, there were a million and a half Christians, and today there are less than 350 thousand”. In this reference to the drastic decrease in the number of

Christians in Iraq, registered since 2003, nothing is mentioned to the US-led international military intervention designed to end the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The resolution, the text of which was sent to Agenzia Fides, states that “the indigenous communities of the Iraqi region of Nineveh Plain – Assyrian Christians Syrians and Chaldeans, Yazidis and others – have the right to security and self-determination, in the context of the Republic of Iraq”. In the concluding part, the resolution calls for “the United States and the international community to support the Government of Iraq in implementing the decision to create a Province of the Nineveh Plain, according to the disposition of the Iraqi government cabinet of January 21, 2014, and support the new provincial administration in the realization of its full potential, in line with the legal expressions of self-determination of the local people”.

The resolution sponsored by US lawmakers represents a decided measure in the lively debate under way on the future of the Nineveh Plain. In recent months (see Fides 29/08/2016) a series of actions and utterances by leaders and activists of local political forces on the political and administrative future of which is still controlled by Daesh have also followed. In August, representatives of political parties guided by Christian activists, such as the national Parliamentary Imad Youkhana, requested that the area of Nineveh is to be recognized the autonomy also guaranteed by the Iraqi constitution, allowing local components to manage areas such as security.

Already in late July, the Sunni politician Atheel al Nujaifi, former governor of the Nineveh province and leader of the Al Hadba political Party, had declared that the Nineveh province, once freed from the jihadist Islamic State (Daesh) control, will be transformed into an autonomous region, divided into provinces – six to eight – with also a certain degree of administrative autonomy. These statements still raised once

again the project of an “autonomous, predominantly Christian, province”, to be set up in the Nineveh Plain to recognize the local Christian communities a role in the functioning of the administrative institutions and in the field of protection and security.

The “promises” – pointing in particular to Christians – on the future of the Nineveh Plain accommodation are becoming subject propaganda of political management of the projects that appear competing with each other. Previously (see Fides 19/07/2016), Kurdish leader Masud Barzani, President of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan, during a meeting with Christian politicians held in Erbil, had foreshadowed the creation of a “Christian state” in the Nineveh Plain , and the subsequent call for a referendum to allow the inhabitants of such an autonomous administrative entity to choose their own political framework under the rule of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, rather than under the federal government based in Baghdad.