



ASSYRIAN UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE



Member, Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization (UNPO)
United Nations Forum on Minority Issues
4th Session
November 29-30, 2011

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Committee on International Organizations

Guaranteeing the Rights of Minority Women *Minority Women and Effective Political Participation*

Fostering Civil Society to Combat Political and Economic Disenfranchisement among Minority Women in Post-Conflict Situations.

Thank you Madam Chair:

Comprising just over 5% of Iraq's population prior to the 2003 U.S. led invasion, Iraqi Assyrians currently represent a staggering 22% of the country's refugees abroad.¹ Displacement among Iraqi Assyrians follows in waves after each targeted attack against the country's indigenous Christian community. To date, 70 of Iraq's churches have been bombed, with the most tragic occurring on October 31 of last year where over 50 Assyrians were massacred inside Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation Church during Sunday Mass.²

In addition to concerns of displacement and security, Iraqi Assyrian women face disabling economic pressures as well. One out of ten Iraqi households are headed by women, more than 80% of whom are widowed.³ Yet only 18% of Iraq's labor force is comprised of women and in certain districts of the Nineveh Plains – the region with the highest concentration of ethno-religious minorities – labor participation among women falls below 6%.⁴

The current status of minorities and minority women in Iraq embodies an issue of international concern as it identifies universal barriers towards meaningful participation by such communities in a country's political and economic reconstruction. In post-conflict situations, sectarian tensions marginalize minorities in general and minority women in particular from participating in the country's political and economic development. To ensure their active and meaningful engagement, governments must adopt proactive measures to foster civil society aimed at promoting political and economic involvement by minorities and minority women. Ultimately, a reasoned belief that such communities can influence the direction of their country's democratic progress and economic prosperity will work to reverse the crippling effects of displacement, lack of security and political disenfranchisement that minorities and minority women bear at a much greater extent than other groups in post-conflict situations.

We ask the United Nations and all international bodies involved in post-conflict situations to actively include minorities and minority women in all dialogue relating to the country's rebuilding. In particular, we ask the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI), in cooperation with the Iraqi government, to exercise its mandate and more actively include Assyrian and other minority civil society groups in discourse relating to the implementation of constitutional provisions as well as development of processes acceptable to the Government of Iraq to resolve disputed

¹ Iraq's religious minorities also comprise up to 10% of the country's internally displaced population.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=94389>

² A detailed account of church bombings in Iraq since the 2003 invasion can be found on the Assyrian International News Agency website: <http://www.aina.org/news/20080107163014.htm>

³ http://www.unis.unvienna.org/pdf/factsheets/Iraqi_Women_Facts.pdf

⁴ The Nineveh Plains region is comprised of Tel Kef, Sheikhan and Hamdan iya districts within the Ninewa Governorate in Northern Iraq. http://www.iauiraq.org/documents/489/Iraqi_Women-FINAL.pdf.



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internal boundaries.⁵ Such engagement with minority communities will allow for a greater consciousness of the constitutional guarantees afforded to them in Iraq's new democratic government.

We applaud governments such as Iraq for establishing legal as well as constitutional provisions apportioning seats in the legislature for minorities and women.⁶ But the mere existences of these laws do not guarantee the realization of their goals. In furthering the objectives of Point 26 of the Draft Recommendations, we ask the Forum to realize the necessity of fostering organizations aimed at promoting political awareness, legal education and economic development initiatives, especially in regions that house a substantial minority population, so as to reintroduce communities – like Assyrians – in a country's post-conflict redevelopment.

Thank You.

⁵ U.N. Security Council, 6594th Session, Resolution 2001(2010) "The situation concerning Iraq" (S/RES/2011).

<http://www.uniraq.org/aboutus/mandate.asp>

⁶ Article 49 Section 2 of the Iraqi Constitution aims to hold that 25% of the Iraqi parliament is comprised of women. Constitution of Iraq: http://www.uniraq.org/documents/iraqi_constitution.pdf. Electoral laws passed in 2008 guarantees religious minorities 6 seats: 3 for Christians and one for Yezidis, Shabaks and Mandeans each. The amount is half of the 12 seats recommended by the UN.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7706781.stm