

2011

# Human Rights Report on Assyrians in Iraq The Exodus from Iraq



## **About ACE**

The Assyria Council of Europe (ACE) is an independent body that has been formed to take responsibility for raising awareness of the plight of Iraq's Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans or Syriacs). ACE is concerned that if urgent action is not taken to alleviate the dire situation of the Assyrians in Iraq, then in the near future Iraq may be devoid of its native inhabitants. Furthermore, ACE believes that the European Union (EU), with its increasingly important role in Iraq, is in a good and important position to be able to contribute to the successful maintenance of Iraq's indigenous minorities and that true democracy can only prosper in Iraq if it is based on plurality and the rule of law, principles the EU is itself built upon.

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## List of Abbreviations

ACE	Assyria Council of Europe
AINA	Assyrian International News Agency
HHRO	Hammurabi Human Rights Organization
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
KRI	Kurdish Region of Iraq
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

## 1. Introduction: The Exodus from Iraq

The rich and colourful diversity that used to signify Iraqi culture and its historical roots are severely threatened at the dawn of the 21st century. Iraq's road to stability is blocked by a flaring conflict between a resurgent Shi'ite majority and a humiliated Sunni minority as well as from the expansionist aspirations of an over-confident Kurdish administration in North Iraq. Given the huge exodus of minorities and continuing threats and violence in 2011, there is a genuine worry that Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) in Iraq may not survive the current conflict and that their unique culture and heritage will slowly disappear from Iraq.

Despite a general decrease of violence in 2011, Assyrians and other minorities are constantly experiencing targeted violence, threats and intimidation. They do not have their own militias to defend them and do not receive effective protection or justice. In addition, minorities are also subjected to a pattern of official discrimination, marginalisation and neglect, and suffer from the effects of corruption and a policy based on sectarian interests. Assyrians perceive that they do not belong to the current Iraq and that they are being excluded from civil society. Because of the continuing displacement processes, many Assyrians are not able to sustain themselves, lacking a regular source of income, opportunities and education, and neither the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) nor the central Iraqi government provides sufficient assistance. In addition to the lack of life opportunities, especially in the KRG region and in the Nineveh Plains, Assyrians and other minorities experienced a significant rise in hostile acts and riots inside the KRG boundaries in 2011 compared to 2010. Feeling desperation, Assyrians have become restless people moving from one place to the other, and often express the desire to emigrate.

The huge exodus that has taken place since 2003 marks the biggest threat to the survival of minorities in Iraq. More than half of the Assyrian community has left Iraq since 2003: From more than 1.5 million Assyrians, the Assyrians population is estimated at approximately 500,000 today. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), minorities make up more than 30 per cent of the 2 million Iraqi refugees seeking sanctuary in Jordan, Syria and across the world; the majority of these are Assyrian Christians. Moreover, they represent an enormously disproportionate number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of refugees who moved to neighbouring countries remain trapped in poverty and chronic uncertainty. Unable to return home or to resettle elsewhere, many face growing desperation with each passing year in exile.

This report highlights the situation of the Iraqi Assyrian population in the year 2011, and tries to find an answer to the question why Assyrians have been emigrating from Iraq, shedding light on the conditions under which minority people were living in Iraq of 2011.

ACE documented dozens of attacks, and revealed patterns of structural discrimination against Assyrians and their organizations during 2011. As a result of the continuing violence at least 9 people were killed. Every week seven people were wounded in attacks targeting Assyrians. Six Assyrians were abducted; eight attempts were made to bomb churches and kill as many parishioners as possible. This kind of violence is aimed at causing fear and exodus, destroying minorities' social infrastructure and depriving them of their means of subsistence.

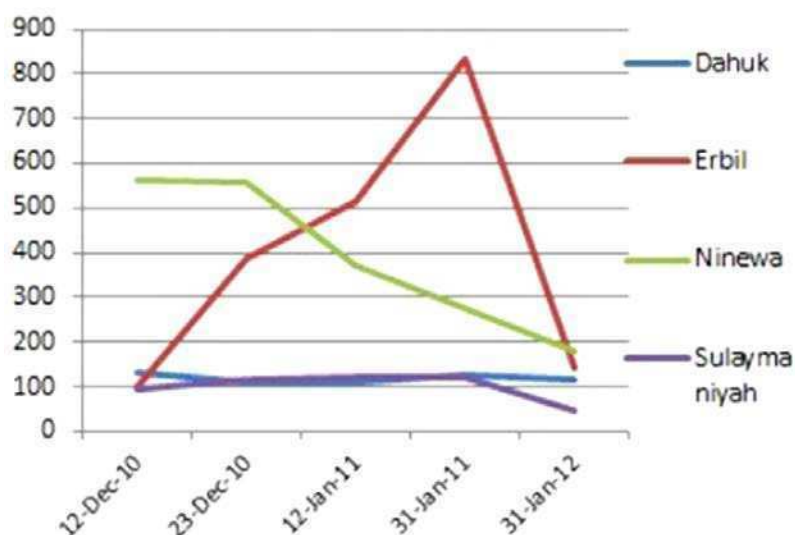
## 2. Migratory flows in 2011

### 2.1 Internal displacement in Iraq

*In 2011 tens of thousands of Iraqi Assyrians have been uprooted, while most of them found themselves constantly on the run. Because of poor future prospects in North Iraq, the majority of Assyrians who had escaped from Baghdad and Mosul, returned to their places of origin or finally emigrated.*

Immediately, after the deadly siege of the Sayidat al-Najat cathedral in Baghdad that killed dozens of people on 31 October 2010, many traumatized families fled Iraq's capital for safer areas in the North and in abroad. From November 2010 to January 2011 persistent insecurity around Baghdad created a huge migratory wave to the northern governorates. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) registered 1354 Christian families, which makes up more than 7000 individuals, seeking refuge in the northern governorates of Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah and Nineveh in January 2011. The greatest influx was monitored in Erbil with over 830 displaced families, almost 730 families and 4000 individuals more than the month before. From the 803 displaced Christian families counted in Erbil in March 2011, 466 came from Baghdad and 294 from Mosul.<sup>1</sup> However, new data from January 2012 show a radical decrease of IDP families in the second half of 2011, particularly in Erbil, but also in the Nineveh Plains.

**Figure 1: Number of post October 31, 2010 Christian IDP families**



Source: IOM, 31. January 2012

Continuing violence and threats against Assyrians in Baghdad and North Iraq, notably in the aftermath of the Sayidat al-Najat siege in October 31, 2010, have left the Assyrian community

<sup>1</sup> UN Security Council 2011, 2nd report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1936 (2010), 31 March 2011.

nervous, and caused emigration abroad or to other places in Iraq. During 2011, IOM recorded 400 new IDP families in Dohuk, but a larger number of families leaving the governorate to emigrate. Most of the movement occurred from Ainkawa (Erbil). While almost 730 new IDP families came to Erbil in January 2011, almost 690 families and 3500 individuals left Erbil in January 2012. In the last few months of 2011, approximately 150 Christian families returned to Baghdad after experiencing difficulties integrating into communities in the North.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2: Change in Number of Displaced Families by Governorate**

Governorate	Number of Families 12/15/2010	Number of Families 1/31/2011	Number of Families 1/31/2012	Change 2010-2012	Change 2011-2012
Dohuk	133	125	116	-17	-9
Erbil	102	831	142	+40	-689
Nineveh	563	276	182	-381	-94
Sulaymaniyah	96	122	49	-47	-73
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>894</b>	<b>1354</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>-405</b>	<b>-865</b>

Source: IOM, 31. January 2012

## 2.2 Emigration and refugees in neighbouring countries

***While the number of Iraqi returnees from Syria increased, emigration among the Assyrian population from Iraq continued in 2011. Despite growing poverty and chronic uncertainty among refugees in Syria, only a small group of Assyrians decided to return to Iraq.***

The actual number of Iraqi refugees is unknown. UNHCR estimates that approximately 2 million Iraqis were displaced in neighbouring countries.<sup>3</sup> Syria currently hosts the highest number of Iraqi refugee and asylum-seeker populations in the world, estimated at over 1.5 million and confirmed at 112,771 Iraqis registered with the UNHCR in 2011.<sup>4</sup>

In the aftermath of the Sayidat al-Najat siege in Baghdad on October 31, 2010, thousands of Iraqi Assyrians sought asylum in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and in most cases applied for formal refugee status in the hope of transfer to third countries, such as the United States, Europe, Canada and Australia. From January to the end of May 2011, 8,719 new arrivals in Syria were registered by UNHCR.<sup>5</sup> In Lebanon UNHCR recorded 1,779 new arrivals. The majority of these arrivals were Christians.<sup>6</sup> Almost 2000 Iraqi refugees fled to Turkey in the first half of 2011, half of the refugee population in Turkey remains Christian (46%). Conversely, a slow departure process is recorded, which protracts the stay of refugees in Turkey.<sup>7</sup>

During 2011, UNHCR recorded 28,230 Iraqi returnees from Syria while the number for 2010 and 2009 combined was put at 29,135.<sup>8</sup> Most of these returnees prefer to assess the conditions in Iraq

<sup>2</sup> IOM, Emergency Needs Assessment – Update: Displacement of Christians to the North of Iraq, 31 January 2012.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Iraq Operation, Monthly Statistical Update on Return – December 2011, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, Syria Fact Sheet – November 2011, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Regional Response Plan for Iraqi refugees – 2011 Mid-Year Review, July 2011, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR Iraq Operation, Monthly Statistical Update on Return – December 2011, p. 2.

before taking advantage of UNHCR's assistance programme for repatriation in order to maintain a link in a country of asylum.<sup>9</sup> The number of resettlements (3,684 departures and 8,505 submissions) to another country (mostly to Canada and the U.S.) exceeds the number of repatriations by far.<sup>10</sup>

According to information received from the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration, only 71 Christian families from Syria have returned to Iraq since 2008 (see appendix). With an average of five members in each family, this makes up not more than 355 persons. Perceived insecurity and the fear of being caught in a civil war in Syria have contributed to an increase of Iraqi returnees in general but did not have an effect on Christian refugees. Most of them wait for their resettlement to Western countries.

### *Unrest in Syria drives Iraqi refugees deep into poverty.*

The civil uprising that erupted in Syria in March 2011 has been a concern for refugees and humanitarian actors. Current instability induced an economic deterioration with a slump of the GDP, less investments and a decline of tourist industry.<sup>11</sup> As many refugees have been working in the informal labour market, tourism industry and domestic service sector, they were facing difficulties to secure a minimum financial income. A prolonged stay in exile and no formal means of social and financial security have aggravated their impoverishment and their vulnerabilities, as reported by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This development represents a significant threat to Iraqi children and women: Prostitution is among the main protection risks. In order to make ends meet, many refugee girls and women are forced into prostitution. With economic conditions worsening all the time for refugees, Syria is seeing a rise in child exploitation and prostitution.<sup>12</sup> According to OCHA, *"the current unrest in Syria is clearly having a negative impact on the psycho-social and mental status of refugees, in particular the long-stayers and those with no return pattern movement."* Observers noted higher levels of distress and manifestations of pressure as well as a regression of coping mechanisms among refugees, which resulted in an increase of domestic and gender based violence and suicidal behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the Syrian uprising has contributed to delays of resettlement processes for refugees. Several refugee resettlement programmes had to delay or cancel their operations.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): Regional Response Plan for Iraqi refugees – 2011 Mid-Year Review, July 2011, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, Syria Fact Sheet – November 2011, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook – Slowing Growth, Rising Risks, September 2011, p. 96ff.

<sup>12</sup> I.a. Refugees International, Iraqi Refugees: Women on the Margins, <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/blog/iraqi-refugees-women-margins>, December 2009, accessed: February 2012.

<sup>13</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Regional Response Plan for Iraqi refugees – 2011 Mid-Year Review, July 2011, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid and The List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies, Iraqis in Syria affected by unrest, <http://thelistproject.org/iraqis-in-syria-affected-by-unrest/>, accessed: February 2012. The List project has clients in Syria who reported that UNHCR and IOM have stopped processing Iraqi refugee cases. UNHCR has not confirmed this information.

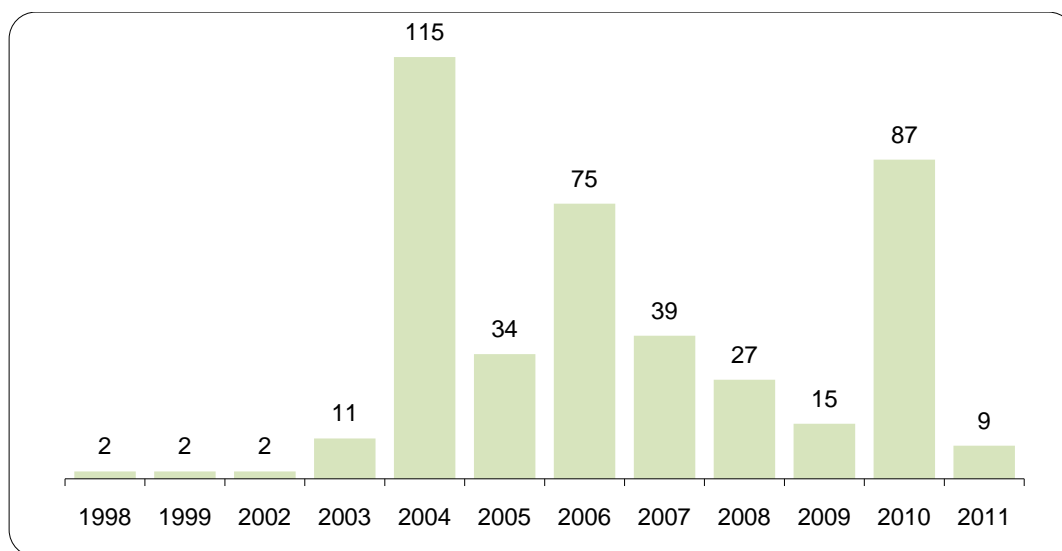
### 3. Reasons for Migration

To understand the motives behind the decision to leave a place of origin, it is important to draw attention to the precarious living conditions that force ethnic minorities to flee.

#### 3.1 Violence against Assyrians continues

***Systematic, persistent, and religious freedom violations continue in Iraq. Members of the Assyrian minority still suffer from targeted violence, threats, and intimidation, against which they receive insufficient governmental protection.***

**Figure 3: Assyrians killed in Iraq since 1998**



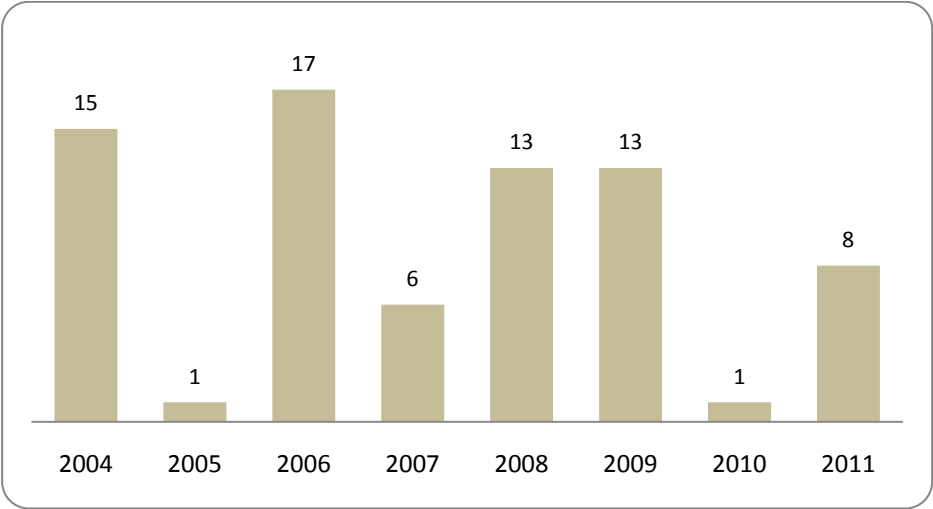
1998 - 2009: Incipient Genocide, BetBasoo, 2012<sup>15</sup>

ACE documented a dozen of attacks against Assyrians during 2011. As a result of these attacks, at least 9 people were killed and more than 72 people were wounded. In contrast to 2010, the violence was concentrated in the northern part of Iraq. The situation in Baghdad remained relatively calm compared to 2010. While violence against Assyrians in 2011 is lower than in 2010, attacks on churches increased. Since 2004, when the first church bombing occurred, more than 70 churches have been attacked. Although no one died in a church attack in 2011, as compared to 2010 when only one church was attacked (Sayidat al-Najat cathedral in Baghdad, killing 58), there were 8 attacks on churches (with three prevented explosions) in 2011. During these attacks more than 35 civilians and security forces were wounded, most of them in the August attacks on churches in Kirkuk. Attacks on religious sites are still used as a tool to suppress the practice of the Christian religion, to intimidate religious minorities in order to compel them out of the country.

<sup>15</sup> BetBasoo, Peter, Incipient Genocide – The Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians of Iraq, 12 June 2008/ Revised 28 February 2012, in: Assyrian international News Agency (AINA).

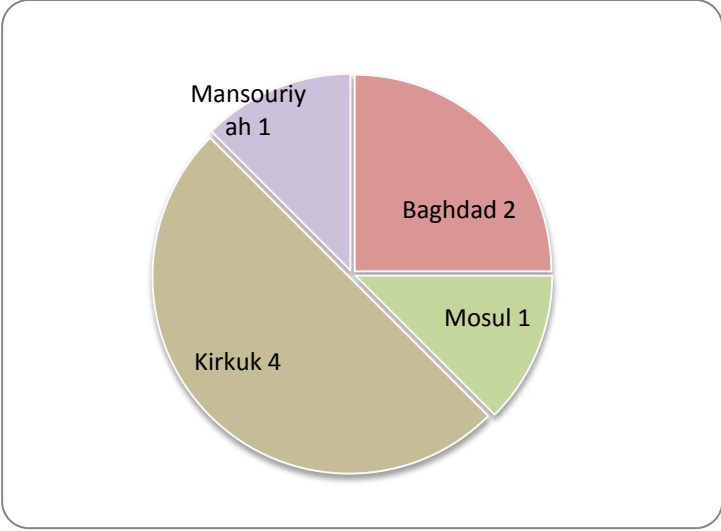


**Figure 4: Church attacks since 2004**



2004 -2009: Incipient Genocide, BetBasoo, 2012

**Figure 5: Places where church attacks occurred**



Kidnapping for ransom is still one of the biggest problems Assyrians face. Six abductions were reported in 2011, five of them occurred in Kirkuk. Many of the victims were freed by paying ransom, while the fate of others remains uncertain. In one case the victim was tortured before he was brutally executed. Ashur Issa Jacob was kidnapped by al-Qaida operatives, who demanded a \$100,000 ransom, but his family was not able to pay more than \$61,500. He was found mutilated in Kirkuk, his head was nearly severed off, his eyes were gouged out, his ears were cut off, and his face was skinned, and marks of dog bites were found on his body (see Appendix).

## Kirkuk

In Kirkuk, violence against Assyrians as well as other minority communities dramatically increased in 2011. Four Assyrians were killed, five abducted, and three attacks on churches were recorded in 2011. Instability in Kirkuk and Mosul is a result of the conflict between Arabs and Kurds over the disputed territories. Both places, in particular Nineveh, used to represent one of the most ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse regions in Iraq, mainly inhabited by Turkmen, Assyrians, Yezidi, Shabak, and other minorities. The KRG and the central Iraqi government are trying to assert security primacy in the absence of a clear political arrangement. The presence of *Peshmerga* and Kurdish security forces in Kirkuk and Mosul, outside the KRG boundaries, exacerbates tensions.<sup>16</sup> In addition, al-Qaeda's strong presence in Mosul and Kirkuk contributes to making the situation particularly volatile.<sup>17</sup> These conflicts lead to a tense environment and minorities find themselves caught in the middle.

## Baghdad

Violence remains a daily fact of life in Baghdad. Although the number of Assyrians wounded and killed declined significantly, there were many attempts to intimidate the Assyrian population with attacks against churches, in most cases using improvised explosive devices.

Jandak Youssif, an Iraqi from Baghdad, describes living conditions in Baghdad: *"The situation is getting worse day by day, and the government doesn't care about our suffering and needs. Our economy is stagnant; illiteracy and unemployment are prevalent; decent public services are not available; and people are leaving the country due to the security situation and religious discrimination. Christians are being attacked and no-one is campaigning for their rights. We are not seeing any improvement in any aspect of our life. My family is scattered in many parts of the world; my parents and brother are stuck in Syria waiting to be relocated to a third country. I have three sisters in Denmark, one in the Netherlands and two in Nineveh Province. Iraq is one of the richest countries in the world but we are the worst in terms of corruption, unemployment and illiteracy."*<sup>18</sup>

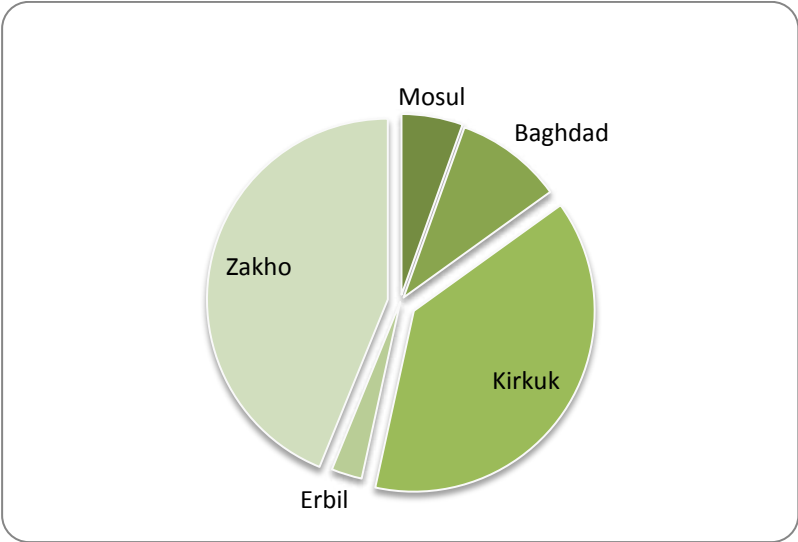
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<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, Report to Congress, August 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis, IRAQ: People consider fleeing as violence increases, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=94677>, 19 January 2012, accessed: February 2012.

Figure 6: Assyrians wounded in attacks, places in Iraq



“Attacks against minorities have had a profound effect by targeting their communities' social infrastructure, leaving victims and others fearful to carry on with their everyday live”, HRW said in its 2011 report on Iraq.<sup>19</sup> They make an impact on the whole neighbouring community, causing fear and unease and prompting inhabitants to flee their homes due to a lack of militia and tribal structures to defend them.



Many Assyrians have received this text message: „If you don't leave this country, we will kill you”

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), Iraq - At a Crossroads – Human Rights in Iraq Eight Years after the US-Led Invasion, February, 2011, p. 65.

## *KRG region*

Violence inside the KRG boundaries reached its peak in December 2011, when hundreds of Kurds in Zakho burned and destroyed businesses and hotels deemed un-Islamic (see Appendix). The riots that spread to numerous places throughout the KRG region are very concerning as they erupted spontaneously after Friday mass and were carried out by the Kurdish population and not by terrorists or criminal groups. The identity of the perpetrators is still unknown, although a special committee set up by the KRG is investigating the riots. However, regardless of who was responsible, it is clear that only a few persons were able to instigate mass riot against minorities and their businesses. The development of the riots reflects the Kurdish population's rejection of non-Islamic elements, which seems to be deeply ingrained in the society. Some observers suggest the riot could have been planned by the Kurdish authorities. Local inhabitants told Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (HHRO) that security representatives had made inquiries in order to find out the number, owners and the locations of liquor stores three days before the riots took place. This may explain why security forces were observing the crowd during the riots but did not intervene when the crowd was about to burn other businesses. The riots in Zakho that spread across North Iraq are just one example of growing religious polarization and intolerance.<sup>20</sup>

## 3.2 Living conditions in the KRI

***In addition to growing security fears, a lack of work opportunities and public services, financial hardship as well as difficulties with education in North Iraq force Assyrians to emigrate.***

### *Suppression of free speech*

Iraq is one of the most hazardous places in the world in regard to freedom of expression.<sup>21</sup> The situation in the Kurdish region is particular worrying, as evident in the reaction of the KRG to the protests of early spring 2011. Journalists were harassed through arbitrary detentions and threats by security forces, which also confiscated and destroyed their equipment. Protests in Sara Square in Sulaimaniyah were violently dispersed by security forces in April 2011. Human Rights Watch characterized the government's response as similar to other despots around the region.<sup>22</sup>

Researching information on discrimination and oppression is hardly possible in KRI as well as in Nineveh Province. Our fact finding mission in April 2011 in North Iraq demonstrated that it is a challenge to get information on discrimination and oppression. People as well as politicians and political parties are frightened to speak against injustice or even to speak about it. NGOs must risk losing their KRG work permit and funding if they are too critical. Human rights organizations often work secretly in order to gain insight into living conditions of minorities. While violence is far

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<sup>20</sup> See for example UNPO/ ACE/ Suomi-Assyria-Yhdistys, *The Last Generation? The Situation of Assyrians in Northern Iraq – Fact-Finding Mission Report*, April 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2011: Iraq*, January, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Iraqi Kurdistan's Silence Spring*, 30 August 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/en/-node/100528>, accessed: February 2012.

lower in the KRG region, civil rights are being suppressed at a far higher rate than in the rest of the country, as reported by HHRO.

### *Discrimination in business and employment*

Not only the trend towards religious intolerance but also economic hardship, a lack of work opportunities, problems with education, property and rental rates have turned lives of ethnic minorities in the KRI impossible in 2011. Yonadam Kanna, Member of the Iraqi Parliament and head of the Labour and Social Affairs Committee, told ACE *“there are no job opportunities and no life opportunities for Assyrian people in the KRG region for many reasons. People are suffering from unemployment and lack of public services, especially those IDPs who have fled from Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk or Basra. Most of the IDPs, even the most skilled professionals, have not been able to gain a job, except for a very small part in the private sector. Another major problem is the language problem both for employment and education. Coming from regions outside the KRG area, many IDPs, especially pupils and university students, are experiencing considerable integration difficulties, as they do not speak the Kurdish language. When there are no life opportunities, IDPs are under pressure, and are consequently trying to flee or to emigrate to somewhere else.”*

While the Kurdish region has attracted foreign investment and construction is booming, Assyrian people, who have long been associated with high levels of education, have great difficulties in finding employment, as entry to the local work force is highly restricted. Assyrians are disadvantaged in the labour market and face great difficulties in forming businesses.<sup>23</sup>

IDPs encounter additional obstacles to finding jobs in the Kurdish administrated area. Apart from the language problem, administrative burdens such as the duty to obtain a residence permit from the KRG Interior Ministry, which has to be renewed on annual basis, impede the search for employment. To get a permit they must also have a local sponsor who can provide assurances.<sup>24</sup>

### *Financial hardship of IDPs*

The International Organization for Migration states that many Assyrian IDPs in the Kurdish administrated area *“chose to emigrate or return in 2011 due to growing security fears, a lack of work opportunities, and difficulty with the transfer of education documents.”*<sup>25</sup> Facing difficulties in transferring their jobs or gaining new employment, many Assyrians are not able to support themselves while displaced. The dramatic increase of rental rates compounds the financial hardship of IDP families in North Iraq. Assyrian IDPs struggle to afford rent, as prices for homes have intentionally been raised because local landlords have exploited the increased demand for shelter.<sup>26</sup> In some areas with a high number of Assyrian IDPs rental prices for very modest accommodation have risen by 200 to 300 per cent since the exodus from Baghdad in November

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<sup>23</sup> UNPO/ ACE/ Suomi-Assyria-Yhdistys: The Last Generation? The Situation of Assyrians in Northern Iraq – Fact-Finding Mission Report, April 2011, pp. 14f

<sup>24</sup> International Rescue Committee, A Tough Road Home – Uprooted Iraqis in Jordan, Syria and Iraq, February 2010, p.6.

<sup>25</sup> IOM, 31 January 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

2010.<sup>27</sup> The usual rate for rent in Ainkawa currently amounts \$700 a month.<sup>28</sup> In addition, many IDPs did not have the chance to sell their original homes for a fair price. Consequently, many families have become impoverished and rely on help from relatives overseas to sustain themselves. The many single households with women as breadwinners are particularly affected. According to the International Rescue Committee, neither the KRG nor the central Iraqi government provides sufficient assistance to the displaced. Where there is assistance, for example in form of food rations, it is hard to access because of extensive legal and bureaucratic impediments.<sup>29</sup>

### *Islamization of social life and oppression of women*

Education is another serious concern for many of the displaced, particularly among university students, who find it impossible to continue their studies at universities outside of Baghdad and Mosul, because of changes in the curricula and language barriers in KRI. The IOM also reports on difficulties in enrolling children in school.<sup>30</sup> Students also complained in interviews with ACE about being treated and rated in a different way than Kurdish students. Female university students encounter great difficulties, and are pressured to dress in Islamic fashion. According to reports from the KRG region women are particularly affected by the religious radicalisation of society; their presence in public is accompanied by danger and restrictions – e.g., concerning dress code and exclusion from certain places.

## 3.3 Situation in the Nineveh Plains

***Minorities in the Nineveh Plains suffer from political mismanagement, a lack of trust in security forces, unemployment and an insufficient educational infrastructure. The work of politicians and organizations is getting increasingly harder due to felt constraints on freedom of expression.***

In 2011 a considerable movement among Assyrians was taking place in Nineveh province because of the still highly dangerous situation in Mosul. As a consequence of continuing violence and discrimination against Assyrians in Mosul, many have been forced to move to the outlying villages. Women have been especially targeted and forced to wear Islamic attire. Assyrian women face constant threats of physical violence and rape. Growing religious intolerance has also been observed across Nineveh province, such as placing Islamic flags on churches during the Day of Ashura.<sup>31</sup>

With their relocation to the rural Nineveh Plains many students have not been able to continue their lessons, and are forced to change their entire course of study or to return to Mosul where

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Chaudhry, Serena, Iraqi Christians find Safety in North, but no Jobs, in: Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/21/us-iraq-christians-idUSTRE78K34A20110921>, 21.9.2011, accessed: February 2012.

<sup>29</sup> International Rescue Committee, February 2010, p.5.

<sup>30</sup> IOM, 31 January 2012.

<sup>31</sup> UNPO/ ACE/ Suomi-Assyria-Yhdistys, April 2011, p. 17.

they are exposed to constant threats and pressures.<sup>32</sup> As a result of the bloody bus attacks in May 2010 many students stopped using the bus service to attend the university in Mosul. Insecurity in Mosul created an unused concentration of academic talent in the Nineveh Plains,<sup>33</sup> and because of the lack of investment in that area no change is to be expected.

Assyrians and other minority communities suffer abuses and discriminations as a result of KRGs aspiration to extend its control. In previous years, Kurdish authorities have been active in reshaping demography and reality in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains. Although Kurds are a small minority and Nineveh is constitutionally and legally under the jurisdiction of Iraq's central government, they have been trying to solidify their presence and use their *Peshmerga* to intimidate local inhabitants, organizations and authorities. Attempts to change the demographic balance are allegedly also made by the central Iraqi government. As Assyrians in the Nineveh Plains reported to the fact finding mission led by UNPO and ACE in April 2011, many resettlements with the aim to introduce Shi'ite settlers are made possible through funding from outside sources.<sup>34</sup> Local community representatives reported that land is being built upon without permission. In Bartallah, for instance, sixty pieces of land had been built upon without permission, peaceful demonstrations broken up and protestors imprisoned.<sup>35</sup>

Members of minority communities in the Nineveh Plains feel that a discriminatory policy intends to disavow them of their legal claims and influence future elections. According to Yonadam Kanna *"the Nineveh province council is practicing a bad policy on the regions' money for development and reconstruction. Most of the projects are for the city of Mosul itself or for other locations, but only few for the regions where Assyrian, Yezidi and Shabak live, resulting in a big lack of public services developments projects in the Nineveh Plains."* Similar to the situation in KRI, unemployment has become a major problem for Assyrian inhabitants in the Nineveh Plains where the infrastructure for employment and education is poorly constructed due to the absence of investment. The provision of healthcare infrastructure, such as hospitals and clinics, is also seen as discriminatory. Clinics in towns such as Bartallah are equipped with technical equipment that is several decades old compared to the more advanced equipment Mosul receives.<sup>36</sup>

The lack of trust in national police and security bodies is pervasive among the community. Trust only exists where state security is predominantly manned by local Assyrians, which is rarely the case. An official police composed of minority groups has not been established because of massive resistance from Kurdish leaders.<sup>37</sup> Unofficial Assyrian defence forces have been able to provide a good level of protection. However, they are composed of volunteers that work on a part-time basis, and are heavily undermanned.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 11ff.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> UNPO/ ACE/ Suomi-Assyria-Yhdistys, April 2011, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Assyria Council of Europe, Ethnic discrimination in the Iraqi police force: The case of Assyrians in the Nineveh Plain of Northern Iraq, December 2010.

<sup>38</sup> UNPO/ ACE/ Suomi-Assyria-Yhdistys, April 2011, pp. 9f.

Freedom of expression is highly restricted in Nineveh. According to HHRO, politicians and organizations rarely work autonomously and criticize authorities without getting into trouble with the highly corrupt Mosul administration.

Mosul's poor administration and mismanagement inhibits the region's development. Yonadam Kanna traces this development back to the fact that responsibility has been lost both in Nineveh since the deployment of three different authorities – Nineveh provincial security forces, KRG forces and central authorities – and additional operations of terrorist groups impede effective and efficient administration and security.



## 4. Conclusion

*With the weak position of minorities and political mismanagement there is little prospect for improvement.*

Members of the Assyrians minority suffered from violence, threats, and intimidation, against which both the Iraqi and the Kurdish Regional Government have not provided effective protection. The consequence is a continuing displacement and emigration process which has not significantly decreased since 2003. In a study on national approaches on internal displacement by the Brooking Institution, the Iraqi government is characterized as “*too weak to prevent displacement and mitigate its effects.*” In addition, the report states that the Iraqi government “*has failed to prevent the displacement of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, some of which now face near extinction due to the fact that many of their members have fled the country.*”<sup>39</sup>

Terrorism, extremism and crime directed towards ethnic and religious minorities have not been the only reason for members of the Assyrian people to despair. Assyrians and other minorities also experience a pattern of official discrimination, marginalisation and neglect. National and religious minorities suffered from political and administrative marginalisation, being the weakest link in the political chain of strong parties.

*Iraqi Constitution does not provide sufficient protection to keep minorities in Iraq.*

Since the establishment of the new Iraq after the fall of the Baath regime, minorities have been excluded and removed from decision-making positions, leading jobs as well as the security and military in the state. Not belonging to large political blocs makes them unable to protect themselves since political blocs are using police and security forces to consolidate their own power. The marginalisation of minorities is partly incorporated in Iraq’s new constitution, which was drafted with little participation from minority groups<sup>40</sup> and adopted in October 2005 by popular referendum:

Article 2.1, for example, designates Islam as the main source of legislation, saying that Islam is the state religion and a basic foundation for the country's law; no law may contradict the established provisions of Islam. Article 4.2 dictates the huge number of official government documents to be published in Kurdish. Article 4.4 complicates mother tongue education for indigenous groups, it demands a population density before recognizing a particular language as official in any region.<sup>41</sup> In 2008 the Iraqi Parliament passed a modification of the provincial election law that reduced the provincial council seats for Christians, Yezidi, Sabeans and Shabak to six, down from 15 in an

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<sup>39</sup> The Brooking Institution – London School of Economics – Project on Internal Displacement (Ferris, Elisabeth/ Mooney, Erin/ Stark, Chareen), *From Responsibility to Response: Assessing National Approaches to Internal Displacement*, November 2011, pp. 25f.

<sup>40</sup> Minority Rights Group International (Taneja, Preti), *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq’s minority communities since 2003, 2007.*

<sup>41</sup> Assyria Council of Europe/ Hammurabi Human Rights Organization, *The Struggle to Exist, Part I: An Introduction to the Assyrians and their Human Rights Situation in the New Iraq*, February 2010.

earlier draft, and only half the number proposed by the United Nations. There are 440 provincial council seats.

Although the Constitution also provides fundamental human rights guarantees, including freedom of religious belief, equality before the law, and equal opportunity, as reported by UN, national institutions to implement these rights remain weak.<sup>42</sup>

*Iraq is far from being a stable democracy, political tensions lead to instability and the re-establishment of insurgent and militia groups.*

After eight years of democracy in Iraq, and shortly after the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country, Iraq is plagued by corruption at all levels of government, and is still far from being a working and stable democracy. On the democracy Index Iraq is classified as a “hybrid regime” (between a “flawed democracy” and an “authoritarian regime”) and comes in at No 112 of the 167 countries ranked for 2011.<sup>43</sup> According to Transparency International, on a corruption scale from 0 to 10, Iraq ranks 1.5, and comes in 175 out of 178 countries, the worst in the Middle East.<sup>44</sup>

As stated by Yonadam Kanna, two major challenges are hampering the country’s progress after the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, namely, the political conflict between the central Iraqi government and the KRG over the disputed areas, and the conflict between the leading political parties, which culminated shortly after the U.S. withdrawal. The composition of the central government is based on a tenuous political agreement among parties and factions reached at the end of 2010, more than nine months after the general elections. In December 2011, a day after the official ceremonies marking the end of the U.S. mission in Iraq, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki issued an arrest warrant for Iraq's most senior Sunni Arab politician, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, on terrorism charges and sought to remove Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq from his position. With this action and his threat to remove all 9 ministers of the Sunni-dominated Iraqiya Bloc al-Maliki triggered a political crisis which revealed Iraq as an unstable, undemocratic country governed by competition for power and barely affected by institutional arrangements.

Large-scale violence immediately flared up again, with a series of attacks mostly against Shia targets. The continuation of a politicized de-Baathification process, arbitrary detentions and, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the weakness of central authority and of the security services may allow militia and insurgent groups to re-establish themselves in some areas.<sup>45</sup>

And indeed, al-Qaida has immediately taken advantage of the political crisis and the withdrawal of US troops late 2011. Previously having the main headquarters in Mosul, al-Qaeda is now

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<sup>42</sup> UN General Assembly – Human Rights Council, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Walter Kälin, A/HRC/16/43/Add.1, 16 February 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, The Democracy Index 2011: Democracy under stress, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Transparency International 2012, [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices-/cpi/2010/results](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices-/cpi/2010/results), accessed: February 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

splitting up its command centres and establishing bases in the provinces of Anbar, Salahaddin and Diyala.<sup>46</sup>

The consequences of fragile democratic processes and the weakness of institutional bindings, resulting from a sectarian based policy, foster instability, leave space for insurgent groups, and are therefore worrying particularly for the dwindling minority population in Iraq. Insufficient security, lack of opportunities, and discriminatory laws deprive members of the Assyrians community of any perspective. They neither receive sufficient protection by the Iraqi and Kurdish government nor do they enjoy fundamental rights that guarantee their existence in Iraq. Beyond and above persistent violence and pervasive rejection of other ethnic and religious elements in society turn life impossible for Iraqi minorities. Given these facts and developments, migration flows towards neighbouring countries are expected to persist. The extinction of the ancient Assyrians minority in Iraq could not be stopped in 2011.

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<sup>46</sup> Waleed, Khaled, Al-Qaeda in Iraq: Group has new offices, new deadly plans for dissent, in: Niqash, <http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2990>, 9 February 2012, accessed: February 2012.

## Appendices

### Attacks on Assyrians in 2011

ACE documented dozens of attacks against Assyrians during 2011, mostly around Mosul, Kirkuk and Baghdad. As a result of these attacks at least 9 people were killed and more than 70 persons were wounded. The following attacks have also received press coverage, mainly by the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA).<sup>47</sup> As freedom of expression is severely restricted, it is assumed that a great number of crimes against Assyrians remain unreported or unpublished. Therefore the data collected do not necessarily give the full picture of the situation.

#### December

On December 15, a number of gunmen shot and killed Adnan Elia, 34, an owner of jewellery shop, and his wife Raghad, 25, as they were walking to their car in the Tammuz 17 neighbourhood in Mosul. Their two children were hurt but are still alive.



On December 12, the 29 year old Sermat Patros was kidnapped in Erbil by a group of four Arabs demanding a \$500.000 ransom. Mr Patros was being freed and his kidnappers arrested.

On December 2, Sargon Lazar, the Iraqi Minister of Environment, survived an assassination attempt when his convey was attacked by a roadside bomb near Baghdad on Thursday. Mr Lazar was not hurt, but members of his security were wounded. The incident occurred in the town of Taji as the convey was on its way to the Salahiddin Province.

On December 2, immediately after Friday prayers, hundreds of Kurds in Zakho were mobilized by the preaching of an Imam to attack Assyrian and Yezidi businesses and properties. The attacks were directed against liquor stores and other places seen as non-Islamic. At least 20 businesses in the predominantly Assyrian town of Zakho were attacked, and at least 32 people were injured. The proprietaries were threatened with further violence if they dared to reopen the businesses. The continuing violence against Assyrians spread to numerous places throughout North Iraq including the towns of Simele, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk (Nohadra), Sheeuz, Amadiyah and Zaweeta.

<sup>47</sup> See also BetBasoo, Peter, Incipient Genocide – The Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians of Iraq, 12 June 2008/ Revised 28February 2012, in: Assyrian international News Agency (AINA).

In addition to many other shops and liquor stores, four hotels, a health club and an Assyrian social club in Dohuk were destroyed, and a massage parlour was burned in Sulaymaniyah. The riots in Zakho took place in front of security forces that did not intervene.

One day later a mob of 100 local Kurds attacked the Assyrian Saint Daniel Church and destroyed a number of Christian homes in Zakho's neighbouring village of Mansouriyah.

The burned liquor shops in Zakho were pasted with Flyers with the message to kill any shop owner that decides to reopen.

### *October*

On October 8, an unidentified assailant attacked the house of Nizar Yousef Elias, 47, in the Hay al-Arab neighbourhood of Mosul and shot him multiple times using a gun with a silencer on Saturday night. Nizar Yousef Elias was seriously wounded.

On October 2, Bassam Isho, a 30 year old restaurant employee was shot dead by a group of strangers in the district of Muthana in Kirkuk.

On October 1, Hanna Polos Emmanuel, born in 1951, lay sprawled on the edge of road that leads from Kirkuk to Baghdad. Hanna Polos Emmanuel was found shot to death.

### *September*

On September 21, three Assyrians, Peter Georgis, 60, Noyant Yelda, 43, Ashur David, 61, and their Turkmen driver, Jankiz Ezz al-Dinwere, were violently abducted in Daqq (30 km south of Kirkuk) and held in a hole underground in the Tal al-Rab'a village by a group of gunmen. The police found their car abandoned and burned. The men were released 9 days later having paid a ransom of \$150,000 dollars, while their Turkmen driver was released without any ransom.

### *August*

On August 19, police forces found the body of Zaia Amanouel Nanno, 42, behind a Law School northeast of Kirkuk. Mr Nanno had been shot three times in the head; signs of torture were found on his body.

On August 15, an insurgent blast left a church building in Kirkuk, the Saint Ephraim Syriac Orthodox Church, severely damaged. No injuries were reported.

On August 2, the Syrian Catholic Church of the Holy Family in Kirkuk was bombed resulting in some 23 Assyrians being wounded. The wounded included church staff and people from houses nearby that were hit by the explosion.

On the same day, two other car bombs, found outside Kirkuk's Christian Anglican Church and the Mar Gourgis church, were defused before they exploded.

These church bombings were part of a wave of violence that swept across Iraq that day, hitting 17 cities and claiming about 70 lives.

### *May*

On May 30, unidentified gunmen assassinated the Arkan Jihad Jacob, 43, in Mosul by using silenced weapons. Mr Jacob, who was Deputy Director of the North Cement Plant, was driving his car near Al-Khayat Circle in Mosul when the attackers killed him instantly and fled away.

On May 16, Ashur Issa Jacob, a 29-year-old Assyrian construction worker, was found dead and mutilated in Kirkuk. He was kidnapped two days before reportedly by al-Qaida operatives having demanded a \$100,000 ransom. His family was not able to pay more than \$61,500. According to the local police Mr Jacob was tortured before he was brutally executed. His head was nearly severed off, his eyes were gouged out, his ears were cut off, and his face was skinned. Marks of dog bites were found on his body. Ashur Issa Jacob is survived by his wife and three children.

### *April*

On April 24, on Easter Sunday an improvised explosive device detonated outside Sacred Heart church in Baghdad's central Karrada district. The explosion occurred after the church had been cleared of parishioners following services on Easter Sunday. Three policemen and four civilians were hurt in the bombing.

In a second attack which occurred outside Mary the Virgin Catholic Church in Baghdad, four Iraqi police officers suffered gunshot wounds in a fire fight with gunmen as congregants huddled inside.

### *February*

On February 24, an armed extremist group burst into the home of the 70 year old Youssif Isho, in Baghdad's central neighbourhood of Karrada, and stabbed him to death with a sharp object. Youssif Isho lived alone in a house. Nothing was stolen from the premises.

On February 13, Ayad Suleiman, 54, was abducted by gunmen while working in a store owned by his family in al-Wasti neighbourhood in Kirkuk. Ayad Suleiman's kidnappers demanded a \$30,000 ransom.

### *January*

On January 15, a group of unidentified terrorists entered the Rabi'a hospital, a private clinic in the Sukar district in Mosul, and shot Nuyia Youssif Nuyia, a very well-known Assyrian doctor who worked there. The doctor, a specialist cardiologist, who was the private physician of the late Archbishop Faraj Rahho and a formerly a military doctor and professor at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Mosul, was found seriously wounded.

On January 6, an attempt to bomb a church in Mosul was foiled by the Iraqi police. According to a security source, six improvised explosive devices and belts laden with explosives were found near a Chaldean church. The attack was supposed to take place on the Christmas celebrations of January 6 with evening mass in the night.

On January 3, several armed men broke into Rafah Toma's home in the al-Wahda suburb of Baghdad, opening fire, killing her, and vanishing with her belongings. Rafah Toma lived alone. She survived the deadly siege of the Sayidat al-Najat cathedral on October 31, 2010.



Suffering the same fate: Widows who have lost their husbands in attacks

Document: Number of Christian refugee Returnees, Ministry of Displacement and Migration

عدد العوائل المسيحية العائدة من خارج العراق موزعة حسب دول المهجر لغاية ٢٠١٢/٢/١٦

عدد العوائل	الدولة	التسلسل
1	اسبانيا	1
1	استراليا	2
27	الاردن	3
1	الامارات	4
1	البحرين	5
3	الدنمارك	6
1	السعودية	7
110	السويد	8
2	المانيا	9
2	اليمن	10
9	اليونان	11
6	امريكا	12
5	ايران	13
1	ايطاليا	14
1	بريطانيا	15
1	تركيا	16
1	رومانيا	17
1	سلطنة عمان	18
2	سلوفانيا	19
71	سوريا	20
2	كندا	21
8	لبنان	22
4	لبنيا	23
4	مصر	24
2	هولندا	25
267	المجموع	

وزارة الهجرة والمهجرين