Profile

There is a community of Armenians in Iraq, most of which are descended from refugees from Urumiya and eastern Anatolia who fled the 1915-18 Armenian genocide. They are Christians – both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. Armenians live mostly in Baghdad, with some presence also around Mosul (prior to the ISIS advance) and Kirkuk in the north as well as a church in Basra (closed). Following the rise of ISIS, many have been displaced from these cities to Iraqi Kurdistan.

Armenians by and large seek to avoid notice, but they remain attached to their country and would consider themselves as part of Iraq. Ethnically distinct from the rest of the population, they are culturally Iraqi.

Current issues

With the outbreak of civil war that followed the toppling of the Hussein regime, Armenians faced the same targeting as other Christian groups. Many Armenians have left Iraq due to violence, harassment and economic decline. A large number have sought refuge in Armenia or among the Armenian diaspora in other countries – either to settle down or wait until the situation in Iraq gets better.

As Christians, Armenians have also found themselves targeted in the recent insurgency by extremist ISIS forces. Following the advance of the group in 2014, many Armenian villages in Northern Iraq feared they would be attack. In response, the Armenian village of Hawresk, west of Dohuk, established its own military force to defend itself from ISIS.

Many displaced Armenians have settled in the relatively safer Iraqi Kurdistan region in recent years. The Constitution of the Kurdistan region recognizes Armenians as an ethnic component, provides the right to mother-tongue education in the Armenian language, and
reserves one seat in parliament for Armenians. There are at least two Armenian schools and five churches in the region.

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