



Iraq – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 27 January 2010

Information on the current situation for members of ethnic minority groups in Iraq.

In a section titled “Members of religious and ethnic minorities (Paragraph 299) a 2003 guidelines document published by the *UN High Commissioner for Refugees* refers to the situation for minorities in Iraq as follows:

“UNHCR has provided in-depth information on the situation of religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Shabak, Kaka’i, Sabaeen-Mandaeans, Baha’i and Jews, since 2003. Political and religious extremism after the fall of the former regime has had a particularly harsh effect on minority groups, which commonly do not have strong political or tribal networks and represent soft targets for radical elements that consider them as ‘infidels’ or supporters of the Iraqi Government and/or the MNF-I and pressure them to conform to strict interpretations of Islamic rules in terms of their dress, social patterns and occupations. Minority groups such as Yazidis, Shabak and Kaka’i, who are often identified as ethnic ‘Kurds’, have also been targeted based on their (perceived) Kurdish ethnicity. Shabak, Turkmen and Faili Kurds, who primarily adhere to the Shi’ite branch of Islam, have been targeted by Sunni Islamists on the basis of their sectarian identity. Since 2003, members of religious and ethnic minorities have become regular victims of discrimination, harassment and serious human rights violations, with incidents ranging from intimidation and threats to the destruction of property, kidnapping, rape, forced conversion and murder. As a result of sustained attacks on minority groups, their numbers have dwindled significantly since the fall of the former regime in 2003. According to UNAMI HRO, members of minority groups continue to be attacked with ‘total impunity’ and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom said that Iraq’s leaders were tolerating attacks on religious minorities.” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (23 July 2003) *Guidelines on International Protection: “Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative” within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*, pp.171-172)

The Introduction to a report from *Minority Rights Group International* states:

“Minorities in Iraq have continued to be targeted on the grounds of their religion or ethnicity since the US-led invasion of Iraq and fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. They have suffered from killings, kidnappings, torture, harassment, forced conversions and the destruction of homes and property. Women have been subject to rape and forced to wear *hijab*. MRG reported extensively on this in 2007. MRG’s online World Directory of Minorities and Peoples also provides more information on these groups and what they are experiencing. Although a dip in the level of violence in Iraq in the latter part of

2007 provided some measure of relief for all Iraqi communities, as violence rose again in 2008 and continued into 2009, minorities and women from minorities continue to suffer. Indeed, the UN describes how minorities are attacked with total impunity.” (Minority Rights Group International (24 September 2009) *Uncertain Refuge, Dangerous Return: Iraq's Uprooted Minorities*, p.9)

The Executive Summary of an *International Crisis Group* report states:

“Caught between Arabs and Kurds are ethnic and religious minorities in whom the central government has evinced little interest. While Ninewa is majority Arab with a strong Kurdish minority, it also counts a number of smaller groups – Christians, Yazidis, Turkomans and Shabaks – that may comprise a mere 10 per cent of the population but are concentrated in disputed borderlands between Kurdistan and Arab Iraq. They have suffered a disproportionate share of the hardship caused by war, occupation and intercommunal violence and fight today for survival. At times co-opted, at others threatened by one of the camps, they have become vulnerable pawns in a contest that often sees them as little more than fodder. In August and September 2009, four bombings took over 100 lives and left many hundreds more wounded. For minorities, these have been among the deadliest of months. There have been signs of late that the federal government and its Kurdish counterparts, with U.S. help and pressure, are seeking to address the problem. But dangers remain high, especially as U.S. military disengagement has begun, with unpredictable consequences on various actors' calculations and the overall balance of forces.” (International Crisis Group (28 September 2009) *Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle Over Ninewa*)

In a section titled “Improve Government Systems and Services” a report from *Refugees International* states:

“Inside the Government of Iraq, sectarian bias remains strong, and political pressure on the Government to address its own sectarianism and rampant corruption must be maintained. According to senior U.S. officials in Baghdad, “there isn't one Government in Iraq”, but a collection of factions, each pursuing its own agenda. Sunnis still largely feel disenfranchised and under-represented, and mistrust towards the Shi'a-dominated Government is present at all levels of society. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration is run by Shi'a Kurds, whose first priority has been the resettlement of refugees coming back from Iran. Most advisors to the Prime Minister are Shi'a. IDPs feel it is much easier for displaced Shi'a than for displaced Sunnis to gain assistance. Similarly, many Iraqi NGOs working in Sunni areas report having trouble registering with the Government of Iraq. One NGO representative told us that when she went to the government NGO office to register her organization, she was asked why she works in ‘these areas,’ referring to the Sunni neighborhoods of Baghdad.” (Refugees International (7 April 2009) *Preventing the Point of No Return*, p.3)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

International Crisis Group (28 September 2009) *Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle Over Ninewa*

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Sources Consulted:

ACCORD

Center for Strategic & International Studies

Electronic Immigration Network

European Country of Origin Information Network

Human Rights Watch

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

International Crisis Group

Minority Rights Group International

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

Refugees International

UK Home Office

UNHCR Refworld

US Department of State