Table of Contents

1. History of Christianity in Iraq 3
2. Christianity under the rule of Saddam Hussein 4
3. Christianity in Context 5
4. The effect of the U.S.-led invasion on Assyrian Christians 6
5. Christians and the Constitution 7
6. Attacks on Christians since 2003 8
   a. Threats 8
   b. Attacks on Churches 9
   c. Kidnappings 11
d. Violent Attacks on Christians 12
e. Attacks on Women 12
7. Other Injustices towards Christians 13
   a. Corruption 13
   b. Jizya Tax 14
   c. Education 14
d. Property Theft and Extortion 15
e. Registration of Religious Minority Groups 15
f. National Identity Cards 15
8. The Government’s Failure on behalf of Iraqi Christians 16
9. Iraqi Christian Refugees 17
10. Conclusions and Recommendations 19
1.

**History of Christianity in Iraq**

Iraqi Christians are very proud of their historic and cultural background. The majority of Christians belong to the same ethnic group, a people group that dates back thousands of years to the Assyrians described in several Old Testament books of the Bible, including Daniel and Jonah. Assyrian Christians originate from the northern Nineveh region of the country, now the area around the city of Mosul. They are the indigenous peoples of Iraq, living in the country long before the 7th Century, and the only people in the world to speak Syriac, a form of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus Christ. The Assyrian Christians of Iraq are a link to Mesopotamia’s pre-Christian social and cultural history, but also represent a small percentage of the citizens living in modern Iraq.

The Assyrians eventually converted in the early centuries of Christianity, although there is some disparity concerning the exact beginnings of Christianity in Iraq. Some historians trace Christianity to the first century,¹ and others to the third century.² What is clear, however, is that the Gospel spread to Mesopotamia from Edessa, the core of the Assyrian trading centre and one of the early Christian Church’s most successful missionary sending cities. Christianity made its way from Edessa to the Nineveh region, and then began to spread quickly among the Assyrian people.

Assyrian Christians have a similar ethnic and linguistic background, but now represent three distinct Christian expressions. The Assyrian Christians were one Church until the 13th century when they developed the Nestorian teachings (Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man).³ When the Catholic missionaries arrived in Iraq in the 13th Century, many of the Assyrian Christians accepted the doctrine of

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³ Nestorian teachings differ from Roman Catholicism in their belief that Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man instead of two separate beings.
Roman Catholicism. Those who decided to follow the Roman Catholic teaching eventually became the Chaldean Catholic Church. The other two bodies, known as the Assyrian Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church represent those who kept to the Nestorian teachings. Today, these three denominations make up the majority of Christians living in Iraq.

Assyrians in Iraq have been subject to persecution over the centuries. As a population living between Persia and Rome, the Assyrians often found themselves in the middle of conflicts between the two great empires. Following the establishment of Islam in Iraq in 630 AD, the Assyrians have been the victims to an estimated 30 deliberate attempts at genocide. In 1915, Turks and Kurds killed 750,000 Assyrians and 1.5 million Armenians for religious reasons. The Christian minority also survived several attacks in Semmel in 1933; in the 1960s and 1970s during the Kurdish rebellions; and, during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. As an ancient ethnic group, Assyrians have often been subject to persecution throughout history.

2. Christianity under the rule of Saddam Hussein

Although Saddam Hussein disliked the Assyrians because of their faith, he did not target them specifically. From 1974 to 1989, Iraq underwent a policy known as “Arabization”. During the period of Arabization, 200 Assyrian villages were destroyed and 2000 people were killed. In total 120,000 Kurds, Assyrians, and Turkomans were evicted from Kirkuk so that Arabs could maintain control of the oil-rich

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5 The Syriac Orthodox Church is also known as the Syrian Orthodox Church.
6 Christian History corner: Iraq’s Christians caught in the Middle, Again, supra at note 1.
8 Ibid, 8.
lands. The Iraqi government, concerned that the Kurds might obtain autonomy and claim these lands, decided to evict all non-Arabs from the area. This policy targeted the Kurds, an ethnic group neighbouring the Christians in northern Iraq, who had frequently demanded autonomy from the rest of the country. Although the policy specifically targeted Kurds, Christians living in this area were also seriously affected.

3. Christianity in Context

Although the Assyrians are the native people of Iraq, they are now a minority group within the country. There are currently 29 million people living in Iraq. Of these, 75% - 80% are Arabs, 15% - 20% are Kurdish, and the remaining 5% are Turkmans, Assyrians and other small ethnic minorities. Islam is the predominant religion of Iraq with 97% of the population ascribing to its beliefs. Of these, 60% - 65% are Shi’a Muslims and 32% - 37% are Sunni Muslims. The remaining 3% of the population are Christians and other small religious groups.

The majority of Christians in Iraq are of Assyrian ethnicity. There are approximately 750,000 people identified as members of the Chaldean Catholic Church. Chaldeans make up two thirds of the entire Christian population in Iraq. Assyrian Christians are the second largest group of Christians and have 225,000 members. There are also 15,000 to 16,000 Armenian Christians, and 5,000 to 6,000 Evangelical Christians living in Iraq.

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12 Ibid.
4. **The effect of the U.S.-led invasion on Assyrian Christians**

The fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime and the efforts to establish a democratic Iraqi state have had an enormous effect on Christians living in Iraq. There were 1.4 million Christians in Iraq at the end of the 1980s. In 2003, just prior to the presence of the U.S. military, there were 800,000 to 1.2 million Christians. Since then, the number of Christians has decreased drastically. Although it is difficult to know exactly how many Christians live in Iraq, numbers range anywhere from 500,000 to 800,000.

It is estimated that 350,000 Christians have fled into surrounding countries since March of 2005. Different insurgent groups target Assyrian Christians because Arabs assume that as Christians they have an affiliation with the West. Insurgents and jihadists assume that their Christian beliefs represent a sympathetic western collaboration and therefore are not entitled to protection. When talking about Christians, one insurgent group stated, “The American forces...have found a safe haven and refuge [among] their brethren, the grandchildren of monkeys and swine in Iraq.” The unfairly presumed association with Americans stirs up this kind of hatred, even though Assyrian Christians have no political ties to the West. Violence against Christians has grown in intensity since 2004.

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16. Preventing the De-Christianization of Iraq, supra note 13, p. 4.

5. Christians and the Constitution

The Iraqi Government established a new constitution in 2005. Although the language in the new democratic constitution asserts religious freedom and democratic principles, Christians have not benefited from the religious freedoms or principles delineated in the constitution. In the past five years, persecution continues by groups who primarily oppose Christians’ religious beliefs and historic identities. The Iraqi government has failed to enforce the constitution and provide Christians with the promised protection.

The Iraqi Constitution is founded on the beliefs of Islam and an Islamic understanding of democracy. Article 2 of the constitution, states that Islam and democratic ideals both play a role in national law. Although Iraq is constitutionally democratic, Shar’ia law also ultimately governs. The constitution essentially allows Islamic leaders the ability to veto all laws that are found to be in conflict with Shar’ia law, thus undermining religious freedom or the participation of any other religious group in the political process. The Supreme Federal Court of the country empowers Shar’ia experts, which can lead to a restrictive religious interpretation of rights. As is written in Article 92 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court is to be comprised of judges, experts in Islamic law and legal scholars. Although the constitution encourages freedom of religion, its “legal provisions are subject to interpretations that limit religious freedom”. Christians, as a small minority group, are not represented in the Supreme Court. There is little chance that they can be properly represented in the political or legal system of Iraq.

Although Iraq’s constitution grants freedoms of speech, press, and assembly, it is difficult to determine if these freedoms exist in practice. These “freedoms” can vary according to officials and

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region of the country.\textsuperscript{22} The constitution allows religious freedom but does not offer any protection to individuals who belong to a religion other than Islam. In this way, the constitution has proven unsuccessful in providing assistance for Christians.

Individuals and insurgent groups are behind the targeting of Iraqi Christians, not the government. However, without protection from the courts, law enforcement, or government, the country’s constitutional rights to religious freedom do little to help Christians.

\section*{6. Attacks on Christians since 2003}

Since the beginning of the War in Iraq in 2003, Christians in Northern Iraq – especially in the areas of Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk – have been the victims of countless attacks. These attacks by Islamic insurgent and extremist groups towards Christians strike in varying degrees of violence. The following section will define and list some of the persecution that has occurred against Christians in Iraq.

\textbf{a) Threats}

Threats are the most common type of persecution against Iraqi Christians. Insurgent groups use leaflets, text messages on mobile phones and one-on-one confrontations in order to threaten Christians and their families.\textsuperscript{23} In most cases, the use of threats has caused thousands of Christians to flee the country. Death threats are made against Christians for not following Islamic dress codes; for attending Christian schools; and strangely, for owning liquor stores.

During the reign of Saddam Hussein, only Christians and Yazidis were able to own liquor stores, making it easy for owners to be identified as belonging to an ethnic minority. Christians are constantly

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facing intimidation as they engage in the day-to-day activities of life such as going to the market, work, or school. Ongoing reports of attacks give reason for Christian believers to take more seriously threats and intimidations. Without support from government or the courts, the option for Christians is to stay and endure the persecution or flee the country. More and more, their choice is evidenced by the increase in refugees from Iraq.

b) **Attacks on Churches**

In the past five years, there have been many attacks on Christian churches. Insurgent groups have utilized car bombs and other weapons to destroy church buildings throughout the country. In addition to countless deaths and injuries, these attacks have added to the growing fear of Christians within the country. The following describes some of the reported attacks that have occurred against church buildings.

**August 1, 2004**

Christians in Baghdad and Mosul were targeted when insurgents detonated car bombs outside of five Christian churches. Four of the churches bombed were located in Baghdad, and one was located in the city of Mosul. The attacks occurred simultaneously. Eleven people were killed and forty were wounded.

A letter written by the insurgent group, naming themselves the “Committee of Planning and Follow-up in Iraq”, proclaimed its connection to the attack. The letter stated,

“\[The graceful God has enabled us on Sunday, August 1, 2004, to aim several painful blows at their dens, the dens of wickedness, corruption, and Christianizing. Your striving Brethren were able to blow up four cars aimed at the churches in Karrada, Baghdad Jadida and Dora while another group of mujahedeen hit the churches in Mosul \]

As we announce our responsibility for the bombings, we tell you, the people of the crosses [to] return to your sense and be aware that God’s soldiers are ready for you. You wanted a Crusade and these are its results. God is great, and glory be to God and his messenger.”

\(24\) A Face and a Name: Attacks on Christians, *supra* note 16.
The bombing of churches demonstrates the specific targeting of Christians more clearly than any other form of attack. As noted before, the religious freedom provided for in the constitution does not assist Christians targeted by independent insurgent groups and individuals.

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26 Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq’s Minority Communities since 2003, supra note 21, p. 9.
c) Kidnappings

The kidnapping of Christians is a common occurrence in contemporary Iraq. Hundreds of kidnappings have occurred, and it is extremely likely that more have gone unreported. Commonly targeted, Christians are often business owners or professionals belonging to the working upper class and more likely able to pay a ransom. The following are a sample of the kidnappings that have occurred in the past four years.

October 2006
Father Boulos Iskander, a Syrian Orthodox Priest, kidnapped from a Mosul street. After his abduction, his kidnappers made a demand for $300,000. After several negotiations, the kidnappers reduced the amount to $40,000 if his church would publicly repudiate several remarks made by Pope Benedict XVI about Islam in June of that year. His church put up 30 large billboards around Mosul saying that they disagreed with the Pope. Negotiations, however, abruptly stopped. On October 11, 2007, Father Boulos Iskander’s dismembered body was found. His arms and legs severed from his body and arranged around his head, which was sitting on his chest.  

August 18, 2009
A Christian Iraqi doctor, Sameer Gorgees Youssif, was kidnapped while walking home from his clinic on August 18, 2009 at around 8:15PM. He was beaten and stuffed into the trunk of a car during an electrical blackout. His family did not call the police, fearing the negative effects that would result if the police were involved with the crime. A few days later, the kidnappers phoned Sameer’s wife demanding $500,000 for his life. The amount was dropped two weeks later to $300,000, and then later to $100,000. After finally collecting the requested sum from family and friends, the kidnappers dumped Dr. Youssif in front of a Kirkuk mosque 29 days later. Witnesses saw a police car providing protection for the insurgent groups. When finally released, the doctor was almost unrecognizable having been bound, gagged and blindfolded for the duration of his abduction. He had pressure ulcers on his right thigh and arm; deep wounds on his right shoulder and the back of his neck; and a hematoma on his left arm. There were open wounds around his mouth and wrists evidence of binding and gagging. His left eye was infected and his forehead and nose - bashed.

**d) Violent Attacks on Christians**

In Iraq, Christians have constantly been the victims of varying forms of violent attacks. These examples demonstrate a small sample of the horrendous events.

**October 21, 2006**
Ayad Tariq, a 14-year-old Assyrian Christian, was at work maintaining an electric generator when a group of disguised Muslim insurgents walked in. They asked Ayad for his ID and asked if he was a Christian. After confirming that he was, they began shouting, each grabbed one limb, and finally beheaded him.\(^{30}\)

**November 2006:**
Two masked men entered the home and bedroom of Fekri Toma. His son, Ghandy, was in the room next door and awoke to screaming. Ghandy had to break down the door to get into his father’s room. Once he did, he saw that the two men were trying to behead his father, and had already cut his father’s throat open. Ghandy was able to scare the intruders away before they could completely detach Fekri’s head. Fekri miraculously survived after several operations. This attack occurred on the same day as the bombing of a Catholic church. Preceding both of these events were the Pope’s comments on the violence in Islam.\(^{31}\)

**September 28, 2008**
Christians were demonstrating in Mosul requesting “special provisions for minority representation in the governorate elections”. Violent attacks, carried out by extreme Islamic groups, followed and left forty dead. Following the attacks, 12,000 Christians fled to Mosul. Tensions in the region eased once units of the Iraqi Army were deployed.\(^{32}\)

**e) Attacks on Women**

Christian women are being threatened, or specifically targeted in Iraq for not wearing the hijab; dressing in western-style clothing; or, for not being “conservative enough”.\(^{33}\) In many cases, Christian women have begun dressing as Muslims to avoid threats and attacks. As one woman said, “I always

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dress like a Muslim woman whenever I leave the house. It is dangerous to be easily identifiable as a Christian.”

**Women attacked for not wearing their hijabs**
A Christian woman was killed on October 26th, 2004 for leaving her head uncovered. Two other Christian women who were not wearing *hijabs* had nitric acid squirted into their faces in a public marketplace. 1,500 Christian women stopped attending classes at Mosul University in 2004 because of these and other attacks.

**December 2006**
Iraqi soldiers raided the house of Luana, a young Assyrian Christian woman. The soldiers claimed that they were searching for insurgents. Two days later one of the soldiers returned and threatened to kill her brother if she did not cooperate. He then dragged her into the bedroom and raped her. He left by telling her that if she filed a police report, he would kill her brother.

Females of all ages are in danger of abduction and many have been raped. Many disappear, never to be seen again, and those that are found often commit suicide. Left with the shame of the rape, and without the emotional support they desperately need, they were unable recover from the trauma, and saw no other option than to end their life.

7. **Other Injustices towards Christians**

Violent attacks are not the only injustices that Christians face on a regular basis. Other non-violent situations affect Christians as well.

a) **Corruption**

Corruption is an issue that Christians must face, but have little at their disposal to confront or combat. In many cases, including the kidnapping of Dr. Sameer Youssif, police officers are actually

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34 Terror Reigns over Mosul’s Christians, *supra* note 30, p. 3.
involved in targeting Christians. Family members who went to collect Sameer Youssif after his abduction reported that they had seen a police car stationed near the insurgents at the time of the ransom payment.\textsuperscript{37} The police car appeared to be present for the protection of the insurgents as they collected the ransom. Although it is unclear whether the police were involved in the physical abduction of Sameer Youssif, their appearance demonstrated that Christians could count on little in the way of official police protection from attacking insurgent groups.

\textbf{b) Jizya Tax}

Christians and churches pay a mandatory tax aimed at non-Muslim and non-Arab groups. This tax – known as the \textit{Jizya} – targets all non-Muslim citizens of Iraq. Extremists use the \textit{Jizya} as a way to demand financial contribution for insurgent efforts because Christians did not fight with “the army”.\textsuperscript{38} Injustices mark the Iraqi state, even with its new democratic constitution.

\textbf{c) Education}

In their pursuit of an education, many Christian Iraqi students face persecution for their academic choices. Although Christians are free by law to study or not study Islam in school, many have stated that they felt pressured to do so.\textsuperscript{39} In 2003, leaflet threats were distributed demanding students become Muslim or face death. Following this several Christian schools found bombs on their campuses. On November 11, 2003, a bomb was discovered at St. Thomas’ School in Mosul. The school has 500 students: 450 Christians and 50 Muslims.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} “Kidnapped Christian Doctor in Iraq Freed in Critical Condition”, \textit{supra} note 28.
\textsuperscript{38} “Iraq: The Christian Community and the Church,” \textit{supra} note 27.
\textsuperscript{39} “U.S. Department of State Report 2008,” \textit{supra} note 12.
d) Property Theft and Extortion

Theft and extortion of property belonging to Christians happens via many groups – even official entities. Christians who are in vulnerable positions are often taken advantage of. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) confiscated the property of Christians without compensation in 2008 and then built on the stolen property. The KRG is responsible for much of the discrimination to the ethnic and religious minorities living in Northern Iraq.

One example from 2008 shows how insurgent groups, without hesitation, raided homes belonging to Christians. On October 11, a group of masked men entered the home of Ginna Jacob Yonnan while she and her family were having a meal. One of the men put a gun to her grandson’s head in order to keep them quiet while stealing their valuable possessions. The group then left an explosive device in the house and fled. The bomb detonated after the police arrived. Thankfully, none of the family was injured. However, all of their possessions were gone.

e) Registration of Religious Minority Groups

As a minority group in Iraq, inequities are common against Christian churches. According to the law, religious groups must register with the government in order to be an official entity. However, the government has made it mandatory for churches to have 500 members in order to register. This requirement limits recognition of religious minorities.

f) National Identity Cards

Perhaps, the most dangerous non-violent injustice towards Christians is in the use of National Identity Cards, which all citizens are required to carry. These ID cards state the religion of each citizen and make it relatively simple for insurgent groups to find out to which religion their target belongs. The

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42 Terror Reigns over Mosul’s Christians, supra note 30, p. 2.
cards are the impetus for many acts of persecution, and pose a serious security issue as they paint easy targets for persecution.

Christians in Iraq, though not specifically targeted by the government, are the targets for regular and continuing insurgent attacks and injustices.

8. The Government’s Failure on behalf of Iraqi Christians

As already noted, Iraq’s constitution provides its citizens the right to religious freedom. The problem, however, is that the government does not protect religious freedom. As an Iraqi Christian man reported,

“Violence is not new to [Christians] who have always been targets here. This is because they are the original owners of the country. We are the indigenous people. They want to kick us out. I cannot say who ‘they’ are. It is too dangerous.

The government should say who ‘they’ are, but the authorities never do.”

As the daughter of Sameer Gorgees Youssif, the Christian doctor who was kidnapped, stated,

“Christians have no protection, that’s why we’re persecuted here. We are weak here, that’s why they take advantage of us.”

Without protection from the government, insurgent groups are able to continue their attacks on Christians. If the government were to provide proper protection for all of its citizens – no matter their religion – there would be a substantial decrease in religiously motivated attacks. Tensions and attacks have been shown to decrease when the government intervenes in injustices directed toward Christians.

Following the attacks of extremist Muslim groups on September 28, 2008, the government deployed units of the Iraqi Army to the area where the attacks had occurred. Tensions diminished and many Christians were able to return to their homes. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission

\[\text{\textsuperscript{44}} \text{Terror Reigns over Mosul’s Christians, supra note 30, p. 5.}\]
in Iraq (UNAMI), by the end of 2008, 80% of these displaced Christians had returned to their community homes.\textsuperscript{45} Religious freedom is not sufficient if constitutionally stated but not governmentally enforced. The government of Iraq must be willing and able to ensure the rights of the country’s religious minority groups or the rights are meaningless.

9. Iraqi Christian Refugees

Large numbers of Iraqi Christians have been fleeing or attempting to flee the country since the beginning of the war in 2003. There are approximately 2 to 2.5 million Iraqi refugees around the world.\textsuperscript{46} This number includes both Christians and non-Christians. Of these, 16 – 17\% (320,000-340,000) are estimated to be Christians.\textsuperscript{47} This number may be regarded as particularly high when one considers that Christians make up only three percent of the entire Iraqi population. Most refugees are fleeing to surrounding countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Many of these refugees are Christians escaping their homelands, hopeful for a safer future in other countries. It is significant that 57\% of Iraqi refugees in Turkey and 25\% in Lebanon are estimated to be Christians.\textsuperscript{48}

There are also hundreds of thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). These people are refugees within Iraq, most fleeing to the northern part of the country to regions experiencing less conflict. There are 2,600,000 IDPs in Iraq; and 5\% of IDPs are Christians.\textsuperscript{49} The percentage of Christian IDPs is less than that of refugees because there is little to guarantee protection for Christians within Iraq. Many believe there is more hope for safety abroad. In total, there are 4,800,000 Iraqi “people of

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49}“US Department of State Report 2008,” supra note 12.
“concern” — a combination of Iraqi refugees and IDPs — who have been forced to leave their homes since 2003.\(^{50}\)

Iraqi Christians have had to flee the country for several reasons. The most common is that they, or their family members or neighbours, have had a direct threat to their lives. In Syria, 57% of the refugees interviewed said that they had fled Iraq because of a direct threat to their life,\(^{51}\) and 78% had a family member killed between 2003 and the time of the survey in early 2009.\(^{52}\) The situation in Iraq betrays a danger to the personal security of Christians, as well as other minority groups in the country.

Refugees and IDPs face many difficulties after leaving their homes. Many refugees flee with few possessions and arrive in asylum countries with improper documentation, or arrive illegally altogether. For these reasons, they are often restricted from finding employment. Families able to bring belongings must rely on limited life savings in order to survive in a new country without employment or legal status. After several months, these savings run out and refugees are forced to live more marginalized lives as they struggle to survive without work.

In addition to the work restrictions that refugees face, they are severely limited in regard to education and health care. Children are not able to continue their education, which greatly affects the lives and overall future prospects of pre-school age children and students forced to flee Iraq.

Many refugees fleeing Iraq enter surrounding countries in secret and are accordingly required to maintain a low profile in order to avoid deportation. This makes it extremely difficult for refugees who have no other options before them.

To complicate matters, several asylum countries have begun closing their doors to Iraqi refugees. In Jordan, policies created recently require Iraqi refugees to carry new passports that are

\(^{50}\) UNHCR, “Iraq: Country Operations Profile,” supra note 46.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid.
extremely difficult to obtain.\textsuperscript{53} Syria once had an open door policy for citizens of Arab countries that allowed them a six-month stay within the country. The revised Syrian policy now allows only 15 days before refugees are required to return to Iraq for at least one month. They must then re-apply to enter Syria. Not only are Christian refugees forced to live on the fringes of society once they have left Iraq, they must often do so illegally. Even access to asylum countries does not take into account the underlying issues presented to an individual when forced to flee their home and family because of risk to their personal lives.

Near the end of 2007 and throughout 2008, several Iraqi refugees and IDPs began returning to their homes. In 2008 close to 221,000 refugees returned to their areas of origin. Unfortunately, it is believed that Assyrian Christians were not among this number.\textsuperscript{54}

For outside countries and organizations willing to help, a very difficult balance exists between bringing the necessary vocal attention that demands change, and quietly working behind the scenes to affect change within Iraq itself. Many fear that bringing more worldwide attention to the persecution of Iraqi Christians will simply bring about more persecution from extreme insurgent groups. Regardless, there remains a need to aid Iraqi Christians, hopefully in a way that does not worsen their situation.

\textbf{10. Conclusions and Recommendations}

This report has demonstrated two key problems concerning Christians in Iraq. The first is that Christians have become a target for persecution. Insurgent groups have engaged in violent attacks on individuals, churches, and communities. The second is that the Iraqi government has done little to provide protection for these targeted Christians.


The Canadian Government can assist Iraqi Christians by facilitating their acceptance as refugees into our country. Unfortunately, Canada has not yet played a significant role in this regard. In 2005, Canada accepted a total of 800 Iraqi refugees, including Christian and non-Christian refugees. In 2007, the Canadian government granted 900 refugees access into Canada, a marginal increase. There was a substantial increase in Iraqi refugee acceptance in 2008, when 1800-2000 refugees arrived on Canadian soil.\(^\text{55}\) Again, in 2009, approximately 2500 refugees were accepted through the “Private Sponsored Refugees Program”, and a further 1400 as Government-assisted refugees.\(^\text{56}\) While the Canadian government is improving in its provision for the needs of this heavily persecuted community, efforts to date represent only 0.1% of all Iraqi refugees, and even fewer Christian Iraqi refugees. The Canadian Government is encouraged to find new means by which to increase its acceptance of Iraqi Christian refugees, in particular – not because of their faith, but because of the persecution they face in their home country.

The Canadian government is also encouraged to take action designed to help increase the number of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) by engaging in a promotional program with Canadian Christian churches and other communities that have a demonstrated capacity to engage in this form of sponsorship. In this way, Canada may move toward sponsoring specific refugees and their families, and thus increase the number of Iraqi Christian refugees able to find a secure place to live.

Internationally, Canada can do several things to assist the Christians of Iraq. Canada, as a member of the United Nations, is in a position to request that the government of Iraq comply with international commitments as well as the Iraqi Constitution. Canada is encouraged to take the following actions:


1. Ask the Iraqi Government to:
   a. Place a higher emphasis on the rule of law, particularly by respecting the religious freedom of Christians and other minority groups.
   b. Provide protection for its minority Christian population from Muslim insurgent groups, particularly increased protection in the large northern cities where non-Muslim populations are concentrated. This would help protect Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities in the country as well.
   c. Actively pursue the elimination of corruption within its national and local police forces.
   d. Take appropriate action to punish insurgents.
   e. Remove identification of religion from the National Identification Card.
   f. Eliminate the Jizya tax that targets non-Muslims.

As a country that advocates for human rights, including the freedom of religion, Canada has an important part to play in assisting those who need help around the world. Iraqi Christians have undergone severe persecution for centuries, and most acutely in the last decade, and the time for change is overdue. The Canadian government is strongly encouraged to do whatever it can to assist these Christians in their struggle to survive. Their lives depend on it.