

111TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

S. RES. 322

Expressing the sense of the Senate on religious minorities in Iraq.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 26, 2009

Mr. LEVIN (for himself, Mr. BROWNBACK, Mr. DURBIN, and Mr. LUGAR) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

AUGUST 5, 2010

Committee discharged; considered, amended, and agreed to with an amended preamble

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate on religious minorities
in Iraq.

Whereas the territory of Iraq, the land of Mesopotamia, has millennia of rich cultural and religious history;

Whereas the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians thrived within what are now the borders of Iraq;

Whereas the biblical patriarch Abraham was born in Ur, King Hammurabi ruled from Babylon, and Imam Ali, the founder of Shiite Islam, died in Kufa;

Whereas during the 35-year rule of the Baath Party and Saddam Hussein, and despite the Provisional Constitution of 1968 that provided for individual religious free-

dom in Iraq, the Government of Iraq severely limited freedom of religion, especially for religious minorities, and sought to exploit religious differences for political purposes, leading the United States Government to designate Iraq as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105–292) because of systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom;

Whereas members of religious minority communities of Iraq, both those who have been forced to flee the homeland in which their ancestors have lived for thousands of years and those who remain in Iraq, are committed to maintaining their presence in Iraq and keeping alive their communities’ cultures, heritage, and religions, but threats against them jeopardize the future of Iraq as a diverse, pluralistic, and free society;

Whereas despite the reduction in violence in Iraq in recent years, serious threats to religious freedom remain, including religiously motivated violence directed at vulnerable religious minorities, their leaders, and their holy sites, including Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians and other Christians, Sabeen Mandeans, Yeazidis, Baha’is, Kaka’is, Jews, and Shi’a Shabak;

Whereas the March 2010 Report on Human Rights issued by the Department of State identifies “insurgent and extremist violence, coupled with weak government performance in upholding the rule of law” resulting in “widespread and severe human rights abuses” as among the significant and continuing human rights problems in Iraq;

Whereas although violence has impacted all aspects of society in Iraq, there have been alarming levels of religiously motivated violence in Iraq in recent years;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom continues to recommend that the Secretary of State designate Iraq as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, because of the systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom in Iraq;

Whereas scores of holy sites in Iraq have been bombed since 2004;

Whereas members of small religious minority communities in Iraq do not have militia or tribal structures to defend them, often receive inadequate official protection, and are legally, politically, and economically marginalized;

Whereas in the Nineveh and Kirkuk governorates, where control is disputed between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan regional government, religious minorities have been targeted for abuse, violence, and discrimination;

Whereas before 1951, non-Muslims comprised some 6 percent of the population of Iraq, with Jews as the oldest and largest of these communities, tracing back to the Babylonian captivity of the sixth century BCE, but today the Jewish community in Iraq numbers in the single digits and essentially lives in hiding;

Whereas religious minorities in Iraq, who made up about 3 percent of the population of Iraq in 2003, make up a disproportionately high percentage of registered Iraqi refugees;

Whereas the number of Christians in Iraq was approximately 1,400,000 according to the 1987 Iraqi census but, ac-

ording to the 2009 Report on International Religious Freedom issued by the Department of State, may now number only 500,000 to 600,000;

Whereas the United States is gravely concerned about the viability of the indigenous Christian communities of Iraq and other religious minority communities, and the possible disappearance of their ancient languages, culture, and heritage;

Whereas the Sabeian Mandaean community in Iraq reports that almost 90 percent of its members have fled Iraq, leaving only about 3,500 to 5,000 Mandaeans in Iraq as of 2009;

Whereas the Baha'i faith, estimated to have fewer than 2,000 adherents in Iraq, remains prohibited in Iraq under a 1970 law;

Whereas although hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons have returned to their areas of origin, the numbers of religious minority returnees to Iraq are disproportionately low; and

Whereas members of religious minority communities of Iraq in diaspora have organized to support their communities in Iraq in ways that also benefit the whole of Iraq society by encouraging the rule of law, enhanced security, employment, education and health services: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That it is the sense of the Senate that—

2 (1) the United States remains deeply concerned
3 about the plight of vulnerable religious minorities of
4 Iraq;

1 (2) the United States Government and the
2 United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq should
3 urge the Government of Iraq to enhance security at
4 places of worship in Iraq, particularly where reli-
5 gious minorities are known to be at risk;

6 (3) the United States Government should con-
7 tinue to work with the Government of Iraq to ensure
8 that members of ethnic and religious minorities com-
9 munities in Iraq—

10 (A) suffer no discrimination in recruit-
11 ment, employment, or advancement in the Iraqi
12 police and security forces; and

13 (B) while employed in the Iraqi police and
14 security forces, where appropriate, be assigned
15 to their locations of origin, rather than being
16 transferred to other areas;

17 (4) the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan
18 regional government should work towards a peaceful
19 and timely resolution of disputes over territories,
20 particularly those where many religious communities
21 reside;

22 (5) the United States Government and the
23 United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq should
24 urge the Government of Iraq to—

1 (A) implement in full those provisions of
2 the Constitution of Iraq that provide protec-
3 tions for the individual rights to freedom of
4 thought, conscience, religion, and belief and
5 protections for religious minorities to enjoy
6 their culture and language and practice their
7 religion; and

8 (B) reduce onerous registration require-
9 ments so that smaller religious groups are not
10 disadvantaged in registering;

11 (6) the Government of Iraq should take affirm-
12 ative measures to reverse the legal, political, and
13 economic marginalization of religious minorities in
14 Iraq;

15 (7) the United States Government should as-
16 sist, consistent with local aspirations and develop-
17 mental needs, ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq
18 to organize themselves civically and politically to ef-
19 fectively convey their concerns to government;

20 (8) the United States Government should con-
21 tinue to fund capacity-building programs for the
22 Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights and the inde-
23 pendent national Human Rights Commission, and
24 should continue to help reconstitute the minorities

1 committee to make it an effective voice for Iraqi mi-
2 norities;

3 (9) the Government of Iraq should direct the
4 Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights to investigate and
5 issue a public report on abuses against and the
6 marginalization of minority communities in Iraq and
7 make recommendations to address such abuses; and

8 (10) the United States Government should en-
9 courage the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan
10 Regional Government to protect the linguistic and
11 cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and ethnic and re-
12 ligious identities of minority groups, in particular
13 those living in the Nineveh Plain.

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