

111TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. RES. 322

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

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 26, 2009

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

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# RESOLUTION

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

Whereas threats against the smallest religious minorities in Iraq jeopardize the future of Iraq as a diverse, pluralistic, and free society;

Whereas according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, there are grave threats to religious freedom in Iraq, particularly for the smallest, most vulnerable religious minorities in Iraq, including Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and other Christians, Sabean Mandeans, and Yazidis;

Whereas the February 2009 Country Report on Human Rights issued by the Department of State identifies ongoing “misappropriation of official authority by sectarian,

criminal, and extremist groups” as among the significant and continuing human rights problems in Iraq;

Whereas in recent years, there have been alarming numbers of religiously motivated killings, abductions, beatings, rapes, threats, intimidation, forced conversions, marriages, and displacement from homes and businesses, and attacks on religious leaders, pilgrims, and holy sites, in Iraq, with the smallest religious minorities in Iraq having been among the most vulnerable, although Iraqis from many religious communities, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, have suffered in this violence;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom continues to recommend that the President designate Iraq as a “country of particular concern”, or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, because of the ongoing, severe abuses of religious freedom in Iraq;

Whereas the Assyrian International News Agency reports that 59 churches have been bombed in Iraq between June 2004 and July 2009;

Whereas persecution and violence in Iraq have extended to church leaders as well, such as the March 2008 kidnap for ransom and killing of 65-year-old Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho;

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

Whereas control of ethnically and religiously mixed areas, including the Nineveh and Kirkuk governorates, is disputed between the Kurdistan regional government and the Gov-

ernment of Iraq, and Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and other Christians, Sabean Mandeans, Yazidis, Shabak, and Turkomen are caught in the middle of this struggle for control and have been targeted for abuses and discrimination as a result;

Whereas governments in the region report that approximately 2,400,000 refugees and asylum seekers have fled Iraq since 2003;

Whereas many religious minorities in Iraq, who made up about 3 percent of the population of Iraq in 2003, have fled to other areas in Iraq or to other countries, where they reflect a disproportionately high percentage of registered Iraqi refugees;

Whereas the flight of such refugees has substantially diminished their numbers in Iraq, and few show signs of returning to Iraq;

Whereas approximately 1,400,000 Christians were estimated to have lived in Iraq as of 2003, including Chaldean Catholics, Assyrian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Syriac Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Armenians (Catholic and Orthodox), Protestants, and Evangelicals;

Whereas it is widely reported that only 500,000 to 700,000 indigenous Christians remain in Iraq as of 2009;

Whereas the Sabean Mandeans community in Iraq reports that almost 90 percent of the members of that community either fled Iraq or have been killed, leaving only about 3,500 to 5,000 Mandeans in Iraq as of 2009;

Whereas the Yazidi community in Iraq reportedly now numbers about 500,000, a decrease from about 700,000 in 2005;

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

Whereas the ancient and once-large Jewish community in Iraq now numbers fewer than 10, and they essentially live in hiding;

Whereas in 2008, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that approximately 221,000 Iraqis returned to their areas of origin in Iraq, the vast majority of whom settled into neighborhoods or governorates controlled by members of their own religious community;

Whereas many of these returnees reported returning because of difficult economic conditions in their countries of asylum, principally Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon; and

Whereas Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and other Christians, Sabean Mandeans, and Yazidis are not believed to be among these returnees: 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 and ethnic
- 4                  minorities of Iraq and is particularly concerned for
- 5                  the Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and other Chris-
- 6                  tians, Sabean Mandeans, Yazidis, Baha'is, Jews,
- 7                  and Muslim ethnic minorities, the Shabak and
- 8                  Turkomen, and other religious and ethnic minorities
- 9                  of 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—

8                             (A) urgently train and deploy into the  
9                         Iraqi police and security forces members of vul-  
10                         nerable minority communities in Iraq, including  
11                         in Nineveh and other areas in which religious  
12                         minorities are located, who are as representa-  
13                         tive as possible of those communities; and

14                             (B) ensure that members of such commu-  
15                         nities—

16                                     (i) suffer no discrimination in recruit-  
17                         ment, employment, or advancement in the  
18                         Iraqi police and security forces; and

19                                     (ii) while employed in the Iraqi police  
20                         and security forces, be assigned to their lo-  
21                         cations of origin, rather than being trans-  
22                         ferred to other areas;

23                         (4) the Government of Iraq should, with the as-  
24                         sistance of the United States Government—

1                             (A) ensure that the upcoming national  
2                             elections in Iraq are safe, fair, and free of in-  
3                             timidation and violence so that all Iraqis, in-  
4                             cluding religious minorities, can participate in  
5                             the elections; and

6                             (B) permit and facilitate election moni-  
7                             toring by experts from local and international  
8                             nongovernmental organizations, the inter-  
9                             national community, and the United Nations,  
10                            particularly in minority areas;

11                           (5) the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan  
12                           regional government should work towards a peaceful  
13                           and timely resolution of disputes over territories;

14                           (6) the United States Government and the  
15                           United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq should  
16                           urge the Government of Iraq to work with minority  
17                           communities and their representatives to develop  
18                           measures to implement article 125 of the Iraq Con-  
19                           stitution, which guarantees “the administrative, po-  
20                           litical, cultural, and educational rights of the various  
21                           nationalities, such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyr-  
22                           ians, and all the other constituents” in Nineveh and  
23                           other areas where these groups are present;

24                           (7) the Government of Iraq should take affirm-  
25                           ative measures to reverse the legal, political, and

1 economic marginalization of religious minorities in  
2 Iraq;

3 (8) the United States Government should direct  
4 assistance to projects that develop the ability of eth-  
5 nic and religious minorities in Iraq to organize  
6 themselves civically and politically to effectively con-  
7vey their concerns to government;

8 (9) the United States Government should con-  
9 tinue to fund capacity-building programs for the  
10 Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights, the independent  
11 national Human Rights Commission, and a new  
12 independent minorities committee whose membership  
13 is selected by minority communities of Iraq;

14 (10) the Government of Iraq should direct the  
15 Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights to investigate and  
16 issue a public report on abuses against and the  
17 marginalization of minority communities in Iraq and  
18 make recommendations to address such abuses;

19 (11) the Government of Iraq should, with the  
20 assistance of the United States Government and  
21 international organizations, help ensure that dis-  
22 placed Iraqis considering return to Iraq have the  
23 proper information needed to make informed deci-  
24 sions regarding such return; and

1                             (12) the United States Government and inter-  
2                             national organizations should continue to work with  
3                             the Government of Iraq to develop the legal frame-  
4                             work necessary to address property disputes result-  
5                             ing when displaced Iraqis attempt to return to their  
6                             homes in Iraq.

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