



## Restriction on Religious Freedom in Iraq

### Challenges to Religious Freedom

Since the 2003 invasion, persecution of religious minorities has drastically increased, spurring a massive exodus from Iraq. Of the 1.4 million Christians in Iraq before the invasion, only about 250,000 still remain.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE GOVERNMENT

Although Iraq's constitution protects the rights of non-Muslim minorities, Article 2 forbids the enactment of any legislation that is contrary to Islamic law. Additionally, Iraq's National Identity Card law presents a serious threat to the rights of religious minorities as it requires all children with one Muslim parent to identify as Muslim and they are not permitted to change their religious identification after conversion to another religion. The government has also failed to stop attacks on Sunni Muslims by the Popular Mobilization Forces, which are local Shi'ite militias backed by Iran.

#### ISLAMIC STATE

ISIS has committed numerous war crimes including the extermination of thousands of civilians, especially Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities, the violent displacement of more than three million Iraqis, and the kidnapping and rape of thousands of innocent women. On several occasions, ISIS has publicly beheaded people who refused to comply with ISIS' demand to convert. Although on the verge of defeat in Mosul, ISIS continues to utilize tens of thousands of civilians as human shields to slow the steady advance of coalition forces.<sup>3</sup>

#### KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

The KRG is a leading member in the fight against ISIS, however human rights and minority groups insist that the KRG is attempting to "Kurdify" the areas it liberates to increase the probability of retaining the territory upon achieving victory. Allegations have surfaced that displaced persons have been kept from returning to their homes and that property belonging to non-Kurds has been destroyed by KRG-affiliated groups.<sup>4</sup>

### Country Overview: Iraq



CIA World Factbook 2017

- **Government:** Federal Parliamentary Republic
- **President:** Fuad Masum
- **Prime Minister:** Haider al-Abadi
- **Population:** 38.1 Million
- **Ethnic Groups:** Arab 80%, Kurdish 15%, Other 5%
- **Religions:** Muslim 99% (Shi'a 59%, Sunni 40%), Other 1%<sup>1</sup>

## Testimony of Persecution

### Qaraqosh

Imagine waking up in the morning to find ISIS bearing down upon your home and the troops sent to protect you had melted away in the night without a trace. That's exactly what the roughly 200,000 residents, mostly Christians, of the Nineveh Plain arose to on August 7th, 2014. Thousands were displaced in a matter of hours as they fled in terror, leaving behind everything but the clothes on their backs. One young Dominican nun recounted their harrowing flight:

"The distance between Qaraqosh and Erbil is only about 50 miles, and should be one hour [by car] but that day it took us from 11:30pm to 10:00am the next day because of the thousands of people who were trying to flee at that point... In the day it was 120 degrees. There was no water. We were walking through the desert. There were people everywhere in Erbil. It seemed like everybody was crying. In our tradition men do not cry,

so to see elderly men crying breaks your heart. People were sleeping in the streets. People lost identity, positions, everything, [and the] government did not care."<sup>5</sup>

## Call to Action

### STUDY

Study the following passages in light of religious freedom persecution in Iraq.

- Romans 8:35-37
- 1 Peter 3:14
- 2 Corinthians 4:8-12
- Psalm 23:4

### PRAY

- That ISIS will soon be defeated
- That the Iraqi government be granted wisdom in reconstruction efforts
- That the rights of religious minorities in Iraq would be protected

### LEARN

- For a deeper understanding of the suffering endured by religious minorities in Iraq, read *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS*, the harrowing story of Farida Kharaf, a Yazidi woman who was kidnapped and brutally abused by ISIS when she was only a teenager.

### STAND

Stand in solidarity with these people of faith by becoming informed and subscribing to Wilberforce's e-newsletter at [21wilberforce.org](http://21wilberforce.org), like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @21Wilberforce

As religious freedom advocates, we mobilize and equip partners, including Christians, activists and people of other faiths, to promote global protections and reforms through Advocacy, Capacity Building and Technology.



[1] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>  
[2] <http://www.christianpost.com/news/christian-iraqi-population-shrinking-with-persecution-worse-than-under-saddam-hussein-166022/>  
[3] [http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2017\\_USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2017_USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf)  
[4] Ibid  
[5] <http://www.21wilberforce.org/am-site/media/edge-of-extinctionfinal.pdf>  
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