

Ethnic discrimination in the Iraqi police force

**The case of Assyrians in the
Nineveh Plain of northern Iraq**



Background

This report focuses on the ethnic discrimination in the Iraqi police force in the Nineveh plain (NP), an area heavily populated by Iraq's vulnerable minorities such as the Assyrians, Yazidies and Shabaks. As the report shows the discrimination against the minorities is evident in the ethnic make up of the local police force. All numbers in the report have been collected through contacts with independent minority groups in Iraq.

Being the last area in Iraq where Iraqi minorities have a strong demographic presence, the Nineveh Plain plays an important role in many ways. A strong presence of the Assyrians, Yazidies, Shabaks, Turkmen and Kakais is essential to keeping Iraq a multi ethnic state. Especially non Muslim minorities such as the Assyrians and Yazidies play an important role



The Nineveh Plain, in yellow, lies east of the city of Mosul and outside the formal boundary of the Kurdish administered area, in brown.

in preserving Iraq as a multi religious society, having a moderating effect on Iraq with their presence and participation in society. Unfortunately Iraq minority numbers are decreasing rapidly as they flee the country due to them not feeling secure.

Security plays a crucial role for the future presence of the minorities in Iraq. As the continuous attacks against Assyrians show, the minorities are in urgent need of formal protection they can trust. This is what they urgently lack in today's Iraq.

The discrimination in numbers

The figures in the columns on the right show the current ethnic make up of police officers in two districts within the Nineveh Plain: the southern Al Hamdaniya district and the north-western TelKeif district.

Assyrians form the majority of inhabitants in the district of Al Hamdaniya but constitute only 32 percent of the total number of police officers. In the north-western TelKeif dictrict the numbers are even more alarming. Assyrians make up only 12 percent of the police officers in the dictrict despite constituting at least half of the population.

The discrimination in the senior levels of the police force in the two districts is even more severe. There are not one single senior police officer in Al Hamdaniya and Telkaif districts with Assyrian background.

The discrimination against the Assyrians in the local police force of these two districts is evident. Despite constituting more than 50 percent of the population the Assyrians are marginalized. This has effects on the entire Assyrian population as they feel partly excluded from the authority which is supposed to give them protection, law and order. It also puts the community in distrust towards the police.

District of Al Hamdaniya

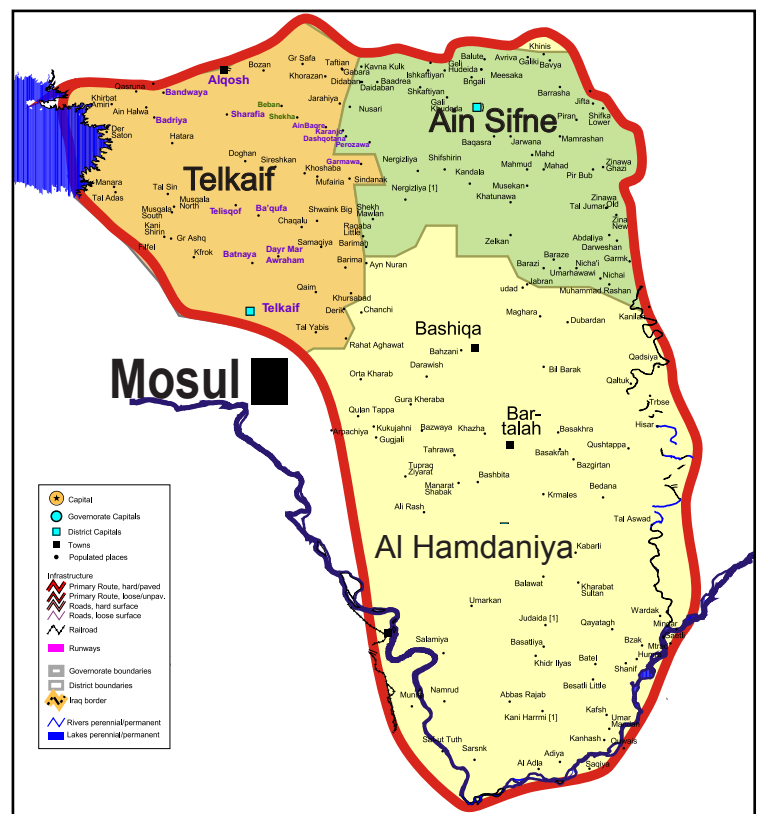
Assyrian	135
Kakiya	123
Shabak	91
Yazidi	54
Turkman	1
Arab and Kurd	22
Total	426

District of Telkaif

Assyrians	39
Yazidi	18
Turkman	7
Shabak	2
Arab and Kurd	261
Total	327

Above: ethnic composition of the police forces in the Al Hamdaniya and Telkaif districts in the Nineveh Plain

Below: The geogaphic position of the two mentioned districts in the Nineveh Plain.



Obstruction of a minority constituted police force for the Nineveh Plain

In the last months of 2005, the United States Army Joint Operation Center, in conjunction with Iraq's Ministry of the Interior decided at the cabinet level to create a battalion-strength (1000 persons) formal police force in the Nineveh Plain made up by members of the minority communities in the Nineveh Plain.

Reports from minority representatives in the NP within a few weeks informed the blockage of this decision in the Ninawa Governorate's Provincial Council. The Governor, urged on by the Deputy Governor, Mr. Khisro Goran of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), prevented implementation of this order. Obstacles were placed in the path of implementing this policy over a period of 7 months.

With the initial US-sponsored effort undermined by the KDP-Deputy Governor in Mosul, the

Ministry of Interior,
Nineveh Province Police Department
Document #: 4336
Date: June, 14th, 2006

Order #1975

In regards to the implementation of the order of the Minister of item #14 of the law regarding the updated clause of employment and pension of the internal security forces #1 of year 1978, and in accordance to the order from the Directorate Office's Assignment Division # 4532 of April 26th, 2006.

This order was directed to us on April 29th, 2006 in a letter #11654 from the Ministry's Office for Police Affairs.

The order was to assign citizens according to the list starting with #1: Namrod Yousif and ending with #711: Wissam Hanna as permanent police officers in the stations applied for.

Signed.

Wathiq Muhamad Abd Al-Qadir
Nineveh Province Police Director

Copies to :

- Ministry of Interior, management office director
- Ministry of Interior, office of the police affairs director
- Nineveh Province Finance department.
- Police directorship- to implement in 15 days from the date of this order.
- Hamdaniya Police Department

elected representatives of the minorities in the Nineveh Plain increased pressure on getting formal policing forces in the Nineveh Plain. The United States Army and Iraqi Government approved 711 names, sending the recruits for training. It appears US military were unaware that the trainers belonged to the same political grouping that successfully blocked the first effort. The recruits were threatened and harassed out of the training program by the trainers.

This second effort to secure the formation of a police

force produced all the necessary administrative measures to formalize it. This is made clear in the original text of the Iraqi Government authorization above. This second effort managed to secure full authorization from the Iraqi Government, in pursuit of establishing a local and representative police force in the Nineveh plain. Kurdish intervention, however, managed to undermine this effort as well. The Kurdish administration in northern Iraq has thus played a very negative role in this issue for political reasons, as the following text shows.

The Iraqi governments authorization of a local police force for the Nineveh Plain from 2005.

The negative role played by the KRG

Kurdish leaders like Massoud Barazani and Jalal Talabani are often cited in the media saying they support the minorities. Their actions are however anything but supportive of the minorities. In the Nineveh Plain armed Kurds from the KRG are placed everywhere and have set up illegal check points. The Kurdish administration has also employed private citizens from minority communities as armed guards who remain illegitimate. At the same time the Kurdish leadership has done everything in its power to stop the formation of a legitimate local police force for the minorities in the Nineveh Plain.

The actions of the Kurdish leadership must be understood from its outspoken political objectives. The KRGs current constitution openly states that the Nineveh Plain must be incorporated into the KRG. The Nineveh Plain is for-

mally outside the boundary of the KRG but has been identified as one of the contested areas between the central power and the KRG.

It is therefore in the interest of Kurdish leaders to keep the existing police force in the Nineveh Plain weak and non representative of the ethnic composition of the area. At the same time the Kurdish leaders try to give the impression to the outside world that they are protecting the minorities in the NP by deploying their own forces into the area as well as setting up groups of armed guards from minority communities who are however ultimately dependent on and loyal to their employer - the KRG.

The acts of the KRG do not respect the will of the minorities and it deprives them of a formal, legitimate and strong police force. The acts of the KRG are in fact adding to the

feeling of insecurity of the minorities and leaving them excluded from taking their own decisions. When faced with critique for their actions in the Nineveh Plain Kurdish leaders often point to the fact that most minorities fleeing from Baghdad and elsewhere seek their way to the Kurdish dominated north of Iraq, alleging the KRG is treating them well. What is important to understand is that the KRG is undermining the rights of minorities as groups but at the same time welcoming their families. This distinction is crucial in order to understand the sophisticated policy of the KRG.

What is important for the minorities is to have their rights as ethnic groups respected. The Kurdish leadership must end its policy of marginalization towards the Iraqi minorities in the Nineveh Plain by respecting the will of the minorities to have a legitimate local police force they can identify with.

Recomendations

To the European Union

The European parliament should include language on the discrimination faced by Iraqi communities in the Iraqi police force in its official statements concerning Iraq.

The European parliaments delegation for relations with Iraq should raise the issue with its Iraqi counterparts

To the Iraqi minister of interior and the authorities in the Ninawa governerate

Implement the previous government order to increase the number of Assyrians in the local police force in the Nineveh Plain so it reflects the Assyrian population size.

Recruit a number of the current Assyrian police officers to become senior police officers in the Nineveh Plain.

Implement the same measures for the other minority groups in the Nineveh Plain

To the KRG

Stop funding the illegitimate guards in the Nineveh Plain

Withdraw all Peshmerga forces from the Nineveh plain

Stop obstructing the formation of a legitimate and locally derived formal police force for the Nineveh Plain.