

Minorities in Iraq THE OTHER VICTIMS



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Letter from the Executive Director

John English
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On behalf of The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), I'm very pleased to introduce our research report on minorities in Iraq. CIGI was founded in 2002 to provide solutions to some of the world's most pressing governance challenges – strategies which often require inter-institutional co-operation. CIGI strives to find and develop ideas for global change by studying, advising and networking with scholars, practitioners, and governments on the character and desired reforms of multilateral governance.

This report is the result of a project started by CIGI under the direction of Senior Visiting Fellow Mokhtar Lamani on the future of minorities living inside Iraq. CIGI is committed to the preservation and promotion of good governance; a central feature, of course, is the inclusion and respect of the multitude of identities and cultures found within a state. The importance of this subject extends far beyond Iraq and has broader relevance for the Middle East and many other regions.

We encourage your analysis and comments. Please visit us online at www.cigionline.org to learn more about CIGI's research programs, conferences and events, and to review our latest contributions to the field.

Thank you for your interest,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John English', is positioned above the printed name.

John English

Introduction

1. Until my resignation in January 2007 from my position as the Arab League Ambassador and Special Envoy to Iraq, I witnessed that all Iraqis from different ethnic, religious and sectarian backgrounds were not only suffering but were also victims of the collapse of the foundations of their societies rooted in Mesopotamian heritage. The Iraqi crisis becomes a question of life or death for hundreds of thousands of people; it is also a threat to a critical part of human history and civilization. The purpose of this report on minorities is not to further divide the Iraqi people; but to illuminate their suffering, which all endure, albeit differently.
2. Where the term minorities is used in this report, it refers to the dozen ethnic and religious groups that are apart from what was established by the occupying forces as an atypical division (Shia, Sunni and Kurd). This political system based on ethnic and religious quotas has emphasized the other minorities' vulnerability to the dangers that have persisted since then.
3. It is clear that this report cannot be considered final. The evolution of the situation on the ground in Iraq, and its implications for all Iraqis, is so rapid and so often contradictory that this report should stay open for future updating, corrections and judgments. Our intention is to present a portrait that is as accurate as possible, to update our conclusions as the situation continues to evolve, and to assess the direction of events. We also offer suggestions for action to alleviate the very difficult circumstances in which minorities find themselves.
4. Mesopotamia has been the birthplace and, for millennia, the home of dozens of ethnicities and religions, which together formed a delicate and beautiful cultural, religious and social mosaic that later came to be an important part of the identity of the modern state of Iraq. For thousands of years, under countless regimes and through successive conflicts, these minority groups have persisted and the mosaic of Iraq has flourished.
5. The ongoing sectarian violence and the inability of the current Iraqi leadership to achieve national reconciliation and a secure social environment threatens to destroy the mosaic that has persisted for all this time. Iraqi minorities are facing a disproportionate level of violence and instability, which threatens to drive them out of Iraq permanently. While Iraqi

minorities make up only five percent of the total population, they comprise more than 20 percent of the displaced population.¹

6. The question of minorities is always a very sensitive issue in the Middle East. Our original plan was to conduct field research on Iraqi minorities in Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Egypt in November and December 2008. Unfortunately we couldn't include Syria, I was informed that this specific mission was not welcome at this time and my assistant, a Canadian, was unable to get a visa. We were able to meet with leaders and other individuals in Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt.
7. The Middle East comprises a myriad of different religious, ethnic, and tribal minorities, all of which have co-existed down through history and preserved their rich identities and traditions over the centuries. Despite their significant cultural and intellectual contributions to the diversity and prosperity of the communities in which they reside, minority groups are the focus of much of contemporary conflict in the Middle East. Many Middle Eastern minorities are facing increasing hostility at the hands of extremist groups and even government bodies. Ironically, even groups that are a physical majority in their countries can sometimes be a political minority in their governments and face similar minority pressures.
8. We still have not seen a constitution based on equal citizenship implemented in the whole region. An example of this is the requirement that citizens of most Middle Eastern countries declare their ethnic or religious background, or both, on their identification cards or official papers. In some cases they are even forced to indicate an affiliation that doesn't reflect reality because their governments do not recognize their religion or ethnic group.
9. We have chosen to focus on the Iraqi case not only because it is a question of life or death for hundreds of thousands of people, but also because the crisis there threatens a critical part of human history and civilization.
10. Iraq has crystallized strong geopolitical and geostrategic tensions that are marked by three layers of complexity:
 - The first is the unfolding of the internal Iraqi socio-political crisis and its different aspects;

¹ Westcott, Kathryn (February 27, 2003). *Iraq's rich mosaic of people*. BBC News. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2783989.stm>

- the second has at its root the extremely complex nature of the regional dimension and its interplay with the internal aspects of the Iraq crisis; and
 - the third is the international interactions inherent in Iraq's position in the region, compounded by its importance to the international economy because of its oil resources and its position in the Middle East.
11. These geo-political and geo-strategic tensions lie at the heart of the threats that minorities face. They are pawns, used by all parties on the chessboard that is the new Iraq. Little if any attention is paid to their genuine needs; rather, their suffering is used to advance other agendas.
 12. If there was ever a need for dynamic new thinking to address governance challenges in Iraq, it is now. By sounding the alarm over the desperate plight of Iraq's minorities, it is hoped this project can begin to stimulate much-needed serious dialogue that can advance positive change for and protection of Iraq's numerous, endangered minorities.

Field Research

13. This first report focuses on the minority groups that reside or have taken refuge in Iraqi-Kurdistan. The rise of sectarianism in other parts of the country has reduced formerly mixed communities into Shia and Sunni enclaves. Many of the religious minorities cannot find protection in either of these and as a result have attempted either to flee the country or to move north to Iraqi-Kurdistan where religious identity is less of a determining factor in security.
14. A total of five days were spent in Iraqi-Kurdistan where Prime Minister Barzani facilitated our visit and provided logistical support and security. We were free to travel and meet anyone we requested; no officials were required to accompany us to these meetings. Numerous meetings were conducted with people displaced by the ongoing violence across Iraq; these included Mandaean families who had fled to Erbil in 2006, as well as Christian families that had fled to Ankawa from Mosul during the second peak of violence there in 2008. We also travelled to visit the Yezidi communities in Qal`at *Shihan* and Lalish. Meetings took place there with the Yezidi Mîr (or prince) and the Baba Sheikh (or pope) as well as a visit to their holy temple in Lalish.
15. Following our trip to Iraqi-Kurdistan, eight days were spent meeting with different representatives and displaced Iraqi minorities in Amman and Cairo. We met with several

Iraqi families who had been forced to flee the country and have found refuge in Jordan. We also met with various officials from the United Nations, Iraqi Members of Parliament, as well as Iraqi leaders from inside and outside the existing political process in Iraq.

16. A significant volume of information was received from many different sources during our research, all of which had to be independently verified before it was included in this report.

Current Situation of Minorities

17. All Iraqis are suffering but there are specificities to the case of minorities that put them at exceptional threat. It has been estimated that because of sectarianism and recent changes to Iraqi society, as many as 25-30 percent of the population have been forced to leave their homes and are either internally or externally displaced. However, for minorities the percentage of those displaced is actually much higher. More than 80 percent of the Mandaean population has been forced to flee; for Christians and other ethnic or religious groups, nearly 60 percent of their populations are displaced.²
18. Iraqi minorities are at risk of extinction. As one inter-faith expert we consulted stated, “when a Muslim is driven from his home, he usually plans on returning once the situation has stabilized; when a Christian or other minority leaves, they never want to come back.” Sadly, the evidence collected to date would seem to support this view; the UNHCR reports that in 2007 less than 1 percent of the displaced were able to return, but even among this paltry number not a single minority person was reported.³
19. The situation of minorities has become worse as a result of the 2003 Iraq war and subsequent occupation. The problems facing minorities, not just in Iraq but across the whole Middle East, have existed long before 2003. One example is the expulsion of the Faili Kurds from Iraq during the Iran/Iraq war. However, the war and occupation have led to dangerous new changes to the local environment that have had a negative impact on the already tenuous situation of many of Iraq’s minorities. The persistent climate of fear and insecurity as well as the entrenchment of sectarianism in the emerging Iraqi political process has spurred massive population displacement, sectarian strife and far-reaching

² Taneja, Preti (February 11, 2007) *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication : Iraq’s minority communities since 2003*. Minority Rights Group International. Available at: <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2805>>

³ (February 2008). *Second Rapid Assessment of Return of Iraqis from Displacement Locations in Iraq and from Neighbouring Countries*. UNHCR. page 13. Available at: <[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2008.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SHIG-7CEDPJ-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2008.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SHIG-7CEDPJ-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf)>

instability. The situation in the country is so fragile that this instability threatens to spiral and engulf the entire region.

- 20.** Violence and displacement have been ongoing and constant in Iraq since 2003, but they reached two peaks that are worth mentioning, when large waves of people suffered multiple acts of violence and forced displacement. In 2006, the Sunni-Shia violence reached its peak and forced thousands of minority families to flee the ethnic cleansing that was taking place to create homogeneous Sunni and Shia neighbourhoods, predominantly in and around Baghdad. This time saw most minorities across the country being forced to flee abroad or to the north. In 2008, a second wave of violence against Christians in Mosul saw thousands of Christian families flee the city and go to Iraqi-Kurdistan. During these periods, Iraq witnessed extensive displacement of people that fundamentally altered the demographic make-up of some parts of the country. It is important to note that these two waves of displacement, in 2006 and 2008, were simply the peaks in the ebb and flow of constant violence; people continue to suffer from insecurity and violence at all times.
- 21.** The flight to Iraqi-Kurdistan of those minorities that cannot escape the country has created enormous pressure on the governance institutions within the Kurdish region. In particular, the government there struggles to provide protection and basic services to the large numbers of displaced that are fleeing towards its borders. One example is in basic education, where minority groups have had difficulty finding spaces; we have been told by Kurdish officials that they have over ten thousand Kurdish students without spaces in schools. The lack of capacity makes it extremely challenging to provide basic services to the local population, let alone to tens of thousands of displaced people.
- 22.** Every minority group we met with during our research was asked if they would stay in Iraq if the constitution offered equal citizenship to all Iraqis irrespective of their ethnic or religious affiliation; unanimously they said that they didn't believe it was possible in Iraq. Although they want to stay, the situation is too dangerous. For many, the only solution is to get out and settle in another country. In addition to the general despair and fear felt by these minorities, there were several specific problems that they all shared regardless of whether they were displaced internally in Iraq or externally in Jordan or elsewhere:

 - lack of basic education opportunities for their children;
 - lack of access to universities;
 - lack of access to employment opportunities;
 - lack of integration into the broader community; and
 - very high level of frustration at the lack of interest from the outside about their situation.

Yezidis

- 23.** The Yezidis are an excellent example of a specific group with some very specific concerns. They almost all live together in Iraqi-Kurdistan and the so-called disputed territories that border it; even though they are minorities at the regional or national level, they are majorities inside their own villages. This has meant that they have not been forced to leave their homes in the same percentages as other groups that are more thinly spread and exposed across Iraq, such as the Mandaeans or the Christians.
- 24.** However, this does not mean that they have escaped persecution. It was reported to us that, because of the violence from extremist groups, there have been no Yezidis left in Mosul since 2007. Unlike Christians who can pay a tax to stay in their homes, the Yezidis can only choose between conversion, expulsion, or execution. In 2007, suspected Al-Qaeda affiliated militants targeted Yezidis, shooting dead 23 on a bus and bombing several villages resulting in hundreds of deaths.⁴ Many extremists consider the Yezidis devil worshippers, and extremist imams have openly called for their killings if they refuse to convert. We were given a recording of Imam Mullah Farzanda making statements in his Friday sermon that it was the duty of good Muslims to kill all Yezidis in Iraq if they refused to convert to Islam. Extremists have made the Yezidis a direct target, despite their relative isolation and small numbers.
- 25.** According to their beliefs, Yezidis can only be baptized in their temple at Lalish; the temple is the centre of their religion and critical to their religious rites. This explains their extreme attachment to their land. The social chaos that has spread throughout Iraq threatens to undermine this attachment and therefore their ability to practice their religion. In the village of Qal`at Shihan Yezidis have traditionally been the majority; now they are moving towards becoming a minority in their own village because of the huge influx of displaced peoples fleeing sectarian violence in other parts of the country. This new demographic balance is difficult for the Yezidis, who have expressed anxiety about this new exposure to potentially hostile groups.
- 26.** The Yezidi community is also vulnerable because of their delicate demographic balance. Their religion does not allow intermarriage with non-Yezidis; even further, there is a caste system within the Yezidi faith that discourages marriage between the different castes. These strict rules around marriage for Yezidis, combined with their already small

⁴ Anonymous (August 17, 2007). *Iraq Bomb Toll Reaches 344*. BBC News. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6951221.stm>

population, make the forced displacement of their people very harmful to the fragile demographic balance that sustains their numbers.

27. Due to the already small size of their population, their attachment to their land, and their strictly closed ranks, the violence and dispersal they are enduring could lead to the extinction of this millennia-old group. The Yezidis we spoke to want their unique cultural identity recognized and protected by the regional and national governments. In particular, they want their religious places in Lalish and their villages protected. Because of their religious attachment to their land they do not want to leave; the best solution in their eyes is a secular government that will protect their rights equally to the rights of other groups.

Mandaeans

28. The Mandaeans also have some very specific concerns. Mandaeans are not concentrated in a few villages; until the outbreak of sectarian violence in 2006 they were spread across several urban centers in Iraq, particularly Baghdad. Their thin distribution made them especially vulnerable to sectarian violence between larger groups and they have fled the country by the tens of thousands; those that could not escape Iraq fled north and took refuge in Erbil. It is estimated that there were as many as 70, 000 Mandaeans worldwide and most lived in Iraq before the 2003 war; less than 5, 000 now remain.⁵
29. Like the Yezidis, Mandaeans do not intermarry and their beliefs are considered heretical by the extremist groups who target them. However, it is not only extremists who target Mandaeans; they have a reputation as being wealthier than ordinary Iraqis because many formerly traded in alcohol, jewelry and other profitable businesses. This has made them the target of criminal gangs conducting kidnappings for ransom.⁶
30. All of the Mandaean families we interviewed said that it was their strong desire to remain in Iraq but their security was too greatly endangered. They did not believe that a constitution based on equal citizenship would ever happen or that their security needs could be met in the short or medium term. They wanted help getting out of Iraq and settling in a safe country such as Australia or the United States. Their religion requires that

⁵ Crawford, Angus (March 4, 2007). *Iraq's Mandaeans face extinction*. BBC News. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6412453.stm>

⁶ Taneja, Preti (February 11, 2007) *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication : Iraq's minority communities since 2003*. Minority Rights Group International. Available at: <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2805>>

they live near running water and conduct their baptisms there but the location of the river itself is not important; for them security is the primary concern.

31. In discussion with Mandaean refugee groups in Jordan it was disclosed that approximately 650 Mandaean families have been forced to flee to Jordan and a further 2, 100 to Syria. Of the 650 families that fled to Jordan, only 202 families remain; the rest have already relocated to the US and Australia. Of those 202 remaining families, 172 have already received approval to transfer to other countries and the remaining 30 are still waiting on their papers to transfer outside.
32. One of their fears as a closed religious group is that they might be spread too thinly across the world and that their religion would simply disappear over time. They consider dispersion to be a threat to their existence and are trying to facilitate their emigration to one country as a group, so that they do not become overly separated. They would prefer to stay in Iraq, but failing that, they are trying to flee as a group to a safe place where they can practice their religion in security and maintain their identity.

Christians

33. Twenty years ago, there were approximately 1.4 million Christians in Iraq; today there are less than 700, 000.⁷ Since the 2003 war, Christians have faced ongoing violence that has peaked twice: the first in 2006; when sectarian violence reached its peak across the country; and the second, in 2008, when most were driven from Mosul to Ankawa and other parts of Iraqi-Kurdistan. Like the Mandaeans, Christians were spread thinly across Iraq and have been caught between larger extremist groups as they fought one another. Many Christians, like those in Mosul, reside within the so-called “disputed territories” and this has added an internal political dimension to their persecution. In several interviews they discussed how Christians had been assaulted, killed, forced to pay the *jeziya*, and in some cases had been threatened even after paying the tax. Most have tried to leave the country and those that cannot have taken refuge in Iraqi-Kurdistan.
34. The Christian identity is not as homogeneous as some of the other Iraqi minority identities. Many Christians not only consider themselves a religion, but also as part of one of four distinct ethnicities as well; Chaldean, Assyrian, Armenian, or Syriac. Chaldeans follow an eastern rite of the Catholic Church; Syriacs consider themselves Eastern Orthodox;

⁷ Phebe Marr, introduction to *Iraq's Refugee and IDP Crisis: Human Toll and Implications* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute). Online source. <<http://www.mideasti.org/files/iraqs-refugee-and-IDP-crisis.pdf>>

Armenians are part of either the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Churches; and Assyrians are part of the Church of the East or Nestorian. Still other Christians consider themselves Arab-Christians, a religious minority but not a separate ethnicity. The Christian community is one of the largest of the minority communities in Iraq and it is difficult to achieve a consensus approach to their problems.

35. Beyond the internal complexities of the Iraqi Christian identity, there is a strong external component in the powerful Christian diaspora communities in other states. These groups have helped to raise awareness about the circumstances of Christians in Iraq; however, they have also added an international layer of complexity to the internal problems that Iraqis face. In particular, the support foreign groups have given to politically contentious positions, such as the Nineveh plains proposal to create a separate autonomous region administered by and catering to minorities, has further complicated an already fragmented political scene.

Turkmen

36. The Turkmen are a distinct ethnic group; approximately 60 percent are Sunni, just fewer than 40 percent are Shia and the remainder are Christians. Like the Christians of Mosul, the Turkmen also reside within the so-called “disputed territories” and have been put under pressure from several groups trying to gain political advantage over each other. Approximately 85 percent of their Iraqi population lives in the regions around Mosul, Kirkuk, Erbil and Tel Afar; the rest are in Baghdad and smaller villages, such as Tuz Khurmato.⁸
37. The Turkmen, like other ethnic minorities, did not have their unique culture recognized by past regimes. “Arabization” and “correction” campaigns refused to acknowledge the Turkmen’s distinctiveness.
38. Presently, the Turkmen community finds itself at the centre of one of Iraq’s most contentious political questions, the fate of oil-rich Kirkuk. Some Turkmen support the Kurdish claim and would like to become a part of the Kurdistan region. Others strongly oppose this for fear of being assimilated into the Kurdish identity. They, therefore, oppose the creation of autonomous regions and favour a strong central government that respects their cultural heritage. As the major parties position themselves to seek maximum

⁸ Munier, Gilles. (May 31, 2007). *Les Turcomans Irakiens: un peuple oublié ou marginalisé*. Le blog de France-Irak Actualité. Available at: <www.gmunier.blogspot.com/2007/05/turcomans-irakiens.html>

advantage against the other in this debate, the Turkmen community is often used by different internal and external parties without any regard for their own concerns.

Other Minorities⁹

- 39.** The minorities discussed above are just some of the many groups that make up Iraq's mosaic. Others not specifically mentioned include the Shabaks, Bahá'ís, Faili Kurds, and Kaka'is (Yaresan), among others. Our access to these groups was limited and some do not reside in the so-called "disputed territories." However, they share some of the same vulnerabilities as the other minority groups that we have discussed and they have an equal stake in the evolution of a national identity in Iraq that is based on equal citizenship, not sectarianism.
- 40.** Like other groups they have been targeted because of their ethnic or religious identity and forced to leave their homes as majority communities try to create religious and ethnically homogeneous enclaves. The toll that violence has taken on these groups is similar to that of the other minorities covered in this report. The Shabaks are mostly located within the so-called "disputed territories" of Mosul and the Nineveh plain; like the Christians and Turkmen that also reside there, they have been caught in the violent political gamesmanship between majority parties over territory. Both the Shia Shabak and the Shia Turkmen have endured a lot of suffering from Al-Qaeda from 2006 to 2008 in the areas around Mosul. The Bahá'í religion is still not recognized by the majority of Middle East governments and they have no right to express their identity. The Faili Kurds, who experienced expulsion during the *Anfal* campaign, are still struggling to return to their expropriated homes.
- 41.** All these problems have at their root the lack of a common Iraqi identity. A governance approach is needed that emphasizes equal citizenship based on respect for human rights, not sectarian affiliation. Ultimately an equal national identity is the only long-term solution that can address all the problems raised by Iraq's minorities. Unfortunately, this approach has not been adopted by the major political and religious parties, and governance challenges have grown worse over time.

⁹ Some intensive analysis of the humanitarian crisis facing a broad range of Iraqi minority groups has been undertaken by Minority Rights Group International. Those desiring more detailed background information regarding specific humanitarian issues relating to a broad range of Iraqi minorities should consult Preti Taneja's report *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's Minorities since 2003* Minority Rights Group International. Available at: <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2805>>

Governance Challenges

42. The relations between the various Iraqi political or religious groups are marred by a high level of mistrust. Since the future is so uncertain, all groups are making maximum demands to try to ensure that their minimum objectives are met; however, this approach is causing more problems than it solves for all concerned. Numerous meetings with politicians confirmed the highly politicized nature of the issues surrounding minorities.
43. Each party is trying to use these issues to condemn other parties. Their competing political demands make the situation even worse for minorities because many of them live in the so-called “disputed territories.” Minorities in Iraq are the victims not only of sectarianism and extremism but of competing political agendas; their displacement is a consequence of both.
44. All parties are essentially reacting instead of acting and this has had profoundly negative consequences. There is little regard for the deep level of suffering that these minority communities are facing; rather than seeking to address the root causes of their misery, major political parties are using this suffering to advance their own political agendas.
45. Minorities have been caught in between, their identity receiving only limited or conditional recognition as they are first told that they are in fact Arab, or that they are Kurd, or that they must change their religion depending on the political demands of the majority group at any given time. The rising influence of religious political parties does not make Iraq’s minorities any more optimistic that the future Iraq will recognize and fully respect their identities and treat them equally to the majority communities.
46. This situation in Iraq stands in stark contrast to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Two clauses stand out in particular,
 - Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person
 - Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
47. Furthermore, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007, clearly lays out numerous protections for indigenous cultures in Article 8:
 1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.

2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:
 - (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
 - (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;
 - (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;
 - (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration;
 - (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

48. It is clear that none of these conventions is being respected in Iraq today. Minorities in particular are constantly under threat and, while immediate violence may be down temporarily, the central government has thus far proved incapable of dealing with the root causes of this discrimination. This leaves a significant likelihood that violence will resume in the not too distant future, particularly as contentious questions are addressed such as the fate of regional boundaries and the future return of some of the displaced. No solution can provide lasting security if it does not strive for the human rights protections expressed by these UN conventions.

49. In this context, the debate about Article 50 of the Iraqi Constitution has been a flashpoint for anxieties relating to the place of minorities in the Iraqi political system and society. Article 50 provided for minimum representation of minorities in elected positions to the provincial governments; it was removed from the provincial election laws in the lead-up to the referendum to ratify the law. This prompted a huge backlash from minority and international groups. Ultimately, the President of Iraq intervened personally to ensure its re-instatement into the law. The fact that this controversy occurred in the midst of ongoing violence against religious and ethnic minorities sent a powerful signal to those groups that the majority parties are not interested in their well-being. This crisis over the election law risked pushing minorities out of the political process and leaving them with only very limited or symbolic representation at a time when they are threatened with extinction.

50. The debate surrounding Article 50 should at best be a temporary one. The best protection is equal, non-sectarian citizenship. Legislation that provides quotas for each minority should only serve as a temporary measure until equality is achieved. This is to say that every Iraqi, regardless of his or her religious or ethnic background, should be free to strive for any position within the political process and not be limited to seats set aside for specific groups.

Conclusions

- 51.** All Iraqis are caught in multiple and contradictory narratives about violence and victimhood. The US occupation and its mistakes have led to the destruction of the fragile Iraqi social tissue and the new political class in Iraq is not yet in a conciliatory mood. Its posture is still essentially reactive in an atmosphere of total mistrust. This atmosphere is complicated by two emerging trends:
1. The ongoing and unsustainable fragmentation within the political and social arena has reached a point where it is impossible to even identify all the actors; and
 2. the narrow focus of the major parties on consolidating their power bases rather than adhering to a real national process of reconciliation, the only guarantee for the future of Iraq.
- 52.** If nothing is done, the extremist danger from one side could lead to the extermination of some of these minorities as well as the destruction of the millennia-old cultural heritage of the Mesopotamian civilization. On the other side, the emergence of religious parties as the main political actors in the new Iraq has left minorities in a very insecure situation and casts doubt on the current government's ability or willingness to address any of these new challenges alone.
- 53.** The solution cannot be only partial. It cannot seek to address the minority issue without putting it in the broader frame that is the Iraqi national crisis, the historically fragile position of minorities in Iraq, the catastrophic consequences of the US invasion and the resulting destruction of the Iraqi social tissue. The way forward must also take into consideration the dangers inherent in the present situation as well as the conflicting agendas of both internal and external actors.
- 54.** The transition to a new US administration based on promised change may offer a possibility of sober reflection on previous US policy towards Iraq. This change in the US administration may present a tangible opportunity to implement much needed corrections that can more effectively address the whole Iraqi crisis, including a real effort towards national reconciliation. Consequently, the issues of minorities could be better managed.
- 55.** For all these reasons, the establishment of an independent international monitoring committee would be a helpful first step in addressing these complications and in bringing forward practical and constructive proposals. A committee comprised only of Iraqi actors

would be limited by the conflicting agendas and mistrust that permeate the present atmosphere. This international monitoring committee would have to be made up of very senior figures known for their professionalism and credibility that would have easy access to the key decision makers locally, regionally, and internationally.

- 56.** The complexities associated with the Iraqi crisis continue to multiply at an exponential rate; the standard mechanisms are proving unable to address this crisis in a fashion that can lead to a durable solution that will correct the current situation and also be acceptable to all actors. It goes without saying that the extinction of Iraqi minorities we not only be a tragedy for them or a loss for Iraq, but for all mankind.

About the Author

Mokhtar Lamani is a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI). Previously, he served as Special Representative of the Arab League in Iraq, appointed by the Council of Arab Ministers of Foreign Affairs in 2006. On behalf of the Arab League, he worked to reconcile fractious parties and sectarian groups in Iraq while building peaceful relations between Iraq and neighbouring countries.

Prior to his position as Special Representative, Mr. Lamani was visiting lecturer at universities across the West and Islamic regions from 2005-2006. As Ambassador of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations from 1998-2004, Mokhtar Lamani represented the OIC to the UN and Coordinator of the OIC group in New York.



His distinguished career in international diplomacy includes a number of positions with the General Secretariat and with the Arab League, including Deputy Permanent Observer to the UN, Officer in Charge of Iraq-Kuwait dispute, Coordinator of Secretariat Reform, and Coordinator of the Euro-Arab Dialogue and Afro-Arab Cooperation.

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