



From the Desk of Dr. John Eibner

November 24, 2008

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki
Office of the Prime Minister
Baghdad
Iraq

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

I write to express my concern about the safety and well-being of Iraq's Christians and other unarmed religious minorities.

Earlier this month, I undertook my third human rights and humanitarian fact-finding visit to Iraq within 12 months. This visit focused on Mosul and the Nineveh Plain - historic homeland of Christians, Yezidis and Shabaks. Our findings correspond entirely with concerns raised by Sen. Barack Obama in a letter to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on the 26th of September:

“Catholic Chaldeans, Syriac Orthodox, Assyrian, Armenian and Protestant Christians, as well as smaller Yezidi and Sabeian Mandaean communities, have paid a heavy price as a result of the conflict in Iraq and continue to face a high level of threat and abuse. Moreover, Christians and other non-Muslim religious minorities continue to constitute a disproportionately high percentage of the Iraqi refugee population. In addition to these troubling trends Christians and other non-Muslim religious minorities continue to face considerable difficulty in ensuring that they are adequately represented in Iraqi governmental institutions.” (Sen. Barack Obama to Condoleezza Rice, September 26, 2008)

Two days after Sen. Obama wrote to the Secretary of State, terrorists launched an intensive campaign of violence against Mosul's Christian community, resulting in the murder of 13 people, the bombing of homes and businesses, and the displacement of approximately 13,000 people – nearly half of the city's Christian population. After a lull of several weeks, the anti-Christian violence erupted again in Mosul on the 12th of this month, with the killing of two Christian women, the wounding of their mother and the destruction of their home.

The evidence gathered by our fact-finding mission points to the conflict between Sunni Arabs and Kurds for control of Nineveh Province and its capital Mosul as the source of the recent upsurge of violence against Christians. Both Sunni Arabs and Kurds have armed forces in the area. These armed forces - including the terror cells of the predominantly Sunni Arab insurgency, mutinous Kurdish officers in the Iraqi Army, and Kurdish *peshmerga* units – together with corresponding political organs, abuse their power to intimidate the unarmed minorities. These minorities are caught in a deadly trap between militarized Arab and Kurdish political movements.

The recent campaign of violence against Christians in Mosul comes in the context of a much broader pattern of persecution. Nearly half of Iraq's Christians have been forced to flee their homes for refuge abroad. Many of those who remain in Iraq are internally displaced. If the present trend is not

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rapidly reversed, Iraq's Christian and other minority communities will soon become extinct.

Fulfillment of these goals is dependent on defeating the Islamic insurgency, securing the withdrawal of occupying Kurdish militias to Kurdistan, and the removal of mutinous elements from the national army. These steps need also to be accompanied by an intensification of investment in the economic infrastructure and in provincial police forces that are accountable to district authorities. Inadequate representation of the religious and ethnic minorities in Iraqi governmental institutions will hinder progress.

The well-being of Iraq's unarmed religious and ethnic minorities is the litmus test for the well-being of the Iraqi nation. I am told by Iraqi friends there is an old Mesopotamian proverb: "When the Christians are well, Iraq is well." Iraq's Christian community is not well, and is suffering from a poison that could soon prove fatal. This poison has also the potential to destroy the Iraqi state.

In the report on our most recent visit to Iraq, CSI presented a set of recommendations for the Iraqi government. They are:

- 1) Convene a high level, inter-agency commission, in cooperation with Coalition Forces, to create a plan - including security and economic dimensions - for the protection of the unarmed minorities in Nineveh Province and oversee its implementation.*
- 2) Make public the results of the Iraqi Government's investigation into the recent campaign of violence against Christians in Mosul.*
- 3) Report on the steps taken by Iraqi Government, in cooperation with UNHCR and the Coalition Forces, to bring about the orderly, voluntary return of Iraqi refugees - including Christians and other minorities - to secure parts of Iraq.*
- 4) Act, in cooperation with Coalition Forces, to end the presence of extra-legal mutinous armed forces in Nineveh Province.*
- 5) Ensure that forthcoming elections in Nineveh Province are conducted fairly, without use of violence, fraud or bribery.*

Please be assured, Mr. Prime Minister, of CSI's best wishes for all the people of Iraq, whatever their religious or ethnic origins, and of our readiness to cooperate with the Iraqi government in collective pursuit of respect for freedom of religion and all fundamental liberties enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments

Sincerely,



Dr. John Eibner
Chairman and CEO