

Nineveh Center for Research and Development

Forum on minority issues

Sixth session: “Beyond Freedom of Religion and Belief: Guaranteeing the Rights of Religious Minorities”

26-27<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Intervention: Item 6 on the agenda

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Madam President, thank you for this opportunity.

The Christian minority in Iraq is one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. The Chaldo-Assyrian minority is ethnically, racially and linguistically one of the oldest original peoples in the region. Today in their historic homeland on a daily basis they are faced with the risk of extinction and the end of their existence as a result of frequent exodus abroad. This occurs for various reasons amongst which are:

- Acts of killing and violence which have been perpetrated on them as a result of their identity and the continuing lack of stability and insecurity.
- Absence laws ensuring non-discrimination.
- Weak and ineffective representation at the governmental and parliamentary level, as well as exclusion from effective economic and political participation in public life and at all levels.
- Perpetuating politics of demographic change and the taking over of their lands and property has affected the particular character of their historic region and their social cultural and religious identity.

- Poor economic conditions and a lack of opportunity for work and for growth and development, and a lack of basic services in the regions in which different minorities live.
- The sovereignty of an exclusionary culture in a society based on discrimination and ignorance of the other ways of life.

These reasons, and others, have led to a dramatic reduction in the number of Christians in Iraq, which has halved since 2003 when they numbered around a million (1,000,000). They were forced to leave their original homeland that they had lived in for thousands of years and the remaining few are threatened with an end to their existence if circumstances continue in a similar vein.

#### Advice for the Iraqi government and the government of Kurdistan and the United Nations

- Pass laws ending legal discrimination. There could be “A law prohibiting religious and sectarian discrimination”. For example, the second article of the Iraqi constitution constitutes a marked challenge to the legal position of non-Muslim minorities. Its existence prohibits passing any law which contradicts Islamic provisions. Also the law forces underage children to change their religion if either of their parents converts to Islam, in what is known as “the Islamisation of minors” without giving them any freedom of choice, a clear example of direct discrimination.
- Adopt measures and provide guarantees to ensure the application of the law and work to bridge the existing gaps between the constitutional text and its actual application.
- Make an educational policy which strengthens understanding of the history, culture and distinctiveness of minorities.
- Necessary involvement of the United Nation’s Special Rapporteur to intercede in amending the academic curriculum and in guaranteeing a curriculum in schools consistent with

human rights including subjects covering the rights of minorities, censorship of anyone who violates or harms the distinctiveness of any minority, and spread understanding and tolerance of others.

- Establish an impartial legal system and a security apparatus which is able to implement and impose the tenor of the law with regard to protecting minorities.