

For Immediate Release
December 14, 2010

WASHINGTON, DC - In advance of the December 15 UN Security Council meeting on Iraq, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today urged the U.S. government to redouble its efforts, and use the international forum as an opportunity, to address the grave situation facing that country's Christians and other imperiled religious minorities.

The Security Council meeting is slated to address the progress in Iraq to date. The recent upsurge in attacks against Christians makes clear, however, that the country's most vulnerable religious minorities remain in peril. The smallest Iraqi religious groups—including ChaldoAssyrian, Syriac, and other Christians; Sabeian Mandaeans; and Yazidis—face targeted violence, including murders and attacks on their places of worship and religious leaders, intimidation, and forced displacement; they also experience discrimination, marginalization, and neglect. As a result, these ancient communities' very existence in the country is now threatened. The loss of the diversity and human capital these groups represent would be a terrible blow to Iraq's future as a secure, stable, and pluralistic democracy.

This is a particularly important period in Iraq, with a new government being formed and the U.S. military presence drawing down. USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government take the following steps to protect these vulnerable communities:

- **Provide Protection:** In consultation with the Christian and other minority religious communities' political and civic representatives, identify the places throughout Iraq where these targeted minorities worship, congregate, and live, and work with the Iraqi government to assess security needs and develop and implement a comprehensive and effective plan for dedicated Iraqi military protection of these sites and areas; as this process moves forward, periodically inform Congress on progress.
- **Promote Representative Community Policing:** Work with the Iraqi government and the Christians' and other smallest minorities' political and civic representatives to establish, fund, train, and deploy representative local police units to provide additional protection in areas where these communities are concentrated.
- **Prioritize Development Assistance for Minority Areas:** Ensure that U.S. development assistance prioritizes areas where these vulnerable communities are concentrated, including the Nineveh Plains area, and that the use of such funding is determined in consultation with the political and civic leaders of the communities themselves.

On December 4, in the wake of the recent spate of attacks, 16 Iraqi Christian parties and organizations issued a compelling joint call for greater protection. USCIRF urges both the U.S.

and Iraqi governments to heed this call and work with these leaders, as well as the leaders of the other small endangered groups in Iraq, on implementing these and other measures to protect and assist these communities before it is too late.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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