



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Religious Minorities' Fight to Remain in Iraq

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Gayle Manchin, USCIRF Vice Chair:

Thank you very much. Iraq's religious minorities—Christians, Yazidis, Mandeans, Kaka'is, and others—are in particular need of international support to ensure that they have a viable future in Iraq. Many members of those communities are now questioning whether there is any genuine hope of returning to safety and security in their homeland. It is up to us to do all we can to help improve conditions on the ground in Iraq to make it possible for them to stay. However, the tragic reality remains that many may choose to find permanent refuge elsewhere in the sadly-growing diaspora of Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities.

In hopes of preventing the long-term disappearance of minorities from Iraq's diverse religious and ethnic landscape, the United States has taken some key steps over the last two years. The U.S. government has devoted \$380 million toward the relief and rehabilitation of northern Iraq's vulnerable minorities who suffered the most under ISIS, largely for distribution through the tireless work of USAID and its partner organizations. Congress passed H.R. 390 in November 2018, also known as the Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act, which President Trump signed into law last December. This act declared that ISIS "is responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and other atrocity crimes against religious and ethnic minority groups in Iraq and Syria, including Christians, Yazidis, and Shi'a Muslims, among other religious and ethnic groups." It further directed U.S. policy to assist in meeting the "humanitarian,

stabilization, and recovery needs” of those communities as well as to support the efforts of governments and nongovernmental organizations to hold ISIS members accountable for the above.

This afternoon, our primary objective is to follow up on the challenges that religious minorities have faced, and to assess efforts to support them as they seek to return home, rebuild their communities, and recover from the traumatic experiences of recent years. On behalf of USCIRF, I look forward to hearing the witnesses’ testimony and recommendations, including the current state of return and reconstruction for those communities hardest hit by ISIS atrocities, and what the United States and Congress can do to enable them to return and remain as integral parts of Iraqi society.

Thank you, and I will now turn the floor back to Chair Perkins.

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