

United States Commission for International Religious Freedom

Thank you, Madam Chairperson and members of the Commission, for the opportunity to testify today. I am honored to contribute to this hearing.

I am an Iraqi-American citizen. I felt a clear calling from the Lord to return to Iraq to engage in gospel work. My family and I serve the Lord and pastor a small house Church in addition to my local pastoral role in an International church in Erbil.

Today, I will outline the challenges faced by Evangelical Christians in Iraq in general, and in the Nineveh Plain in particular.

Evangelical believers are systematically persecuted by traditional churches, specifically the Catholic and Orthodox institutions. Not only do they refuse to recognize us as Christians, but they actively incite those in positions of power against us. As a result, the person who led me to faith was murdered in 2006 by al-Qaeda. Around the same time, another believer was shot and killed. We received repeated death threats, were expelled from our workplaces, and were socially and economically boycotted. Religious authorities instructed people not to buy from us, sell to us, or assist us in any way, including denying us funerals, marriages, and basic civil services.

Today is 2026, and little has changed. We remain unrecognized. We are not allowed to have places of worship. We cannot legally marry or have our own cemeteries. We have no rights at all. If Christians in Iraq are considered second-class citizens, Evangelicals are treated as third-class citizens.

The Iraqi government continues to expand in power, and its methods increasingly resemble the Saddam-era system. The Iraqi National Security Service (INSS) operates in service of Islam; suppressing religious freedom, monitoring evangelism, interfering in church affairs, and committing serious human rights violations.

Recently, two Evangelical brothers from Erbil were arrested while attending business meetings, not church activities, in Nasiriyah. They were violently detained, taken to an unknown security location, and tortured. They were beaten, verbally abused, subjected to electric shocks, and threatened with sexual abuse in order to force confessions that they were evangelizing and connected to Israel. After 48 hours of detention, they were released on bail.

In November 2025, a Christian convert from a Muslim background was arrested by The INSS for evangelizing in public after he was seen praying for a paralyzed person. He was interrogated and unlawfully imprisoned for ten days in an attempt to pressure him into renouncing his faith. He remained steadfast and was miraculously released.

Article 372 of the so-called “Insulting Islam” law is a vague and elastic provision that allows the government to silence anyone who expresses an opinion, including criticism of political figures, who are treated as religious authorities in Iraq. Under this law, Christian evangelism is prohibited because it is classified as “insulting Islam.”

This law completely gags Christians. We are not permitted even to respond to social media posts to defend or explain our faith, nor to speak publicly about abuses committed by extremist Muslims. At the same time, Muslims are legally allowed to criticize Christianity publicly and mock it.

Additionally, Law No. (1) of 2022, which criminalizes Zionism*, is another vague statute that hangs like a sword over the necks of Christians, especially Evangelicals. Biblically, we believe in the Jewish people’s right to their land. Under this law, such a belief can be interpreted as Zionism and can lead to capital punishment in Iraq.

We are not permitted to register churches, which leaves us without legal standing, no recognized marriages, no cemeteries, and no civil protections. In 2017, a judge refused to complete the marriage of a couple from our community after receiving a phone call from a Catholic bishop who told him, “These people are not Christians.”

Every attempt to register a church has been redirected to the Religious Affairs offices controlled by the Catholic Church, particularly under Cardinal Louis Sako, who openly opposes Evangelicals and is the primary figure blocking their recognition and legal rights.

Finally, we suffer under the domination of Iranian-backed militias in our regions and on our lands. Demographic change is one of the most visible realities for anyone who visits Iraq today. Evangelical believers are also widely viewed and treated as spies by these militias.

Thank you for allowing me to share this testimony.

1- Based on what was approved by the House of Representatives in accordance with the provisions of Article (61), Paragraph (a), and Article (73) Paragraph (c), of the constitution.