



Iraqi Christian Foundation
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Statement from Iraqi Christian Foundation
for the USCIRF Commission Hearing on September 18, 2019, on
“Religious Minorities Fight to Remain in Iraq.”

Iraqi Christian Foundation: Who We Are?

The Iraqi Christian Foundation (ICF) is a U.S. 501(c)(3) non-profit founded by the Iraqi-Chaldean Christian community. ICF promotes and advances the human, legal, and political rights of Iraqi Christians and other Middle Eastern Christians through legal projects, humanitarian relief projects, and international advocacy. Most of our team members originate from Mesopotamia (Iraq) and we are the natives of that ancient land. Therefore, ICF has a strong pulse on the history and culture of the indigenous Christian community in Iraq, the current Genocide Iraqi Christians face, and how to return the displaced Iraqi Christians to their homes. ICF also works to find solutions for the Iraqi Christians trapped as refugees in countries surrounding Iraq, rebuild the Christian towns and churches in Iraq, and restore our culture throughout Mesopotamia (Iraq) from Zakho to Basra, Iraq. ICF works in conjunction with the Iraqi Christian leadership in the U.S. and Iraq, and with community members/leaders on the ground in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Syria to serve the persecuted Iraqi Christian community. Additionally, the ICF works with other Christian leaders, charitable agencies, government officials, and human rights organizations to advance this very important cause.

Introduction:

In 2003, there were 1.5 million indigenous Chaldeans and other Christians living in Iraq. Today, there are an estimated 250,000 Chaldeans Christians left in Iraq, due to the brutal 16-year genocide by Al-Qaeda-in-Iraq and its' successor, the Islamic State terrorist group. The vast majority of Iraqi Christians are indigenous Chaldean Christians, and after 2003, we were brutally forced out of our ancestral homeland. A homeland we have always known. A homeland Chaldeans have lived in for over 7,000+ years until a calamity came upon us, which we predicted would happen if the U.S. Government invaded Iraq. Before 2003, our warnings were ignored by the world. Here we stand with all of our warnings having come true; with a brutal genocide unleashed upon us to a degree that even our own community could not fully fathom prior to the 2003 Iraq War. In addition to the majority Chaldean Christian community, the remaining Iraqi Christians consist of Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, and Arab Christians; these communities also faced a similar fate after 2003.



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On June 10, 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) captured Mosul, Iraq. On June 28, 2014, ISIS kidnapped two Chaldean nuns and three Chaldean Christian orphans in Mosul. That was the start of the ISIS phase of the 16-year genocide against Iraqi Christians. On July 14, 2014, ISIS began marking Christian homes in Mosul with the letter “N” for Nazarene, which means a Christian in Arabic. On the same day all five kidnapped Chaldean Christians were released by ISIS. The Chaldean-Iraqi Christian community was relieved and overjoyed; little did we know that was just the beginning of a more brutal nightmare to come. Just three days later, on July 17, 2014, ISIS issued an ultimatum to the Christians of Mosul: “Convert to Islam, pay a jizya or face the sword (die).” Over 15,000 Chaldean, Syriac, and Armenian Christians were forced out of Mosul by July 19, 2014, with only the clothes on their backs, leaving their homes, belongings, money, entire lives behind. For the first time in nearly 2,000 years, no mass was held in the ancient city of Mosul. On August 6, 2014, ISIS terrorist group invades the indigenous Chaldean and Syriac Christian towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq. There are about 9 major Christian towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq; six of those towns are Chaldean Christian towns and the other three towns are Syriac Christian towns. All of these towns, except for the Chaldean Christian town of Alqosh, were overtaken and destroyed by ISIS. Over 13,000 families or 135,000+ Chaldean and Syriac Christians were displaced from Nineveh Plains and Mosul by the ISIS terrorist organization in 2014. Hundreds of Chaldeans and Syriacs were kidnapped by ISIS, with women and children taken into sexual slavery. We faced rapes, murders, beheadings, brutal torture with no assistance from the world to stop the genocide. After having faced persecution for almost two thousand years, the 16-year genocide that started against us in 2003 has been one of the worst genocides in our community’s history. Five years after the ISIS terrorist group invaded Mosul and Nineveh Plains, the Chaldean Christian community and our fellow Christians in Iraq are on the verge of utter extinction from our homeland.

State of Iraqi Christians Today:

Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians are still leaving Iraq due to: a) lack of security; b) unstable, weak, and corrupt Iraq Central and Kurdish Regional Governments; c) dangerous and ruthless Iranian-backed militias and Kurdish Security Forces (Asayish and Peshmerga); d) rampant oppression and religious discrimination, including forcible land theft of our indigenous lands in Northern Iraq and the intentional withholding of economic opportunities for Christians; and e) the fear of another tide of Islamists rising and taking control of the country. Even the so-called “Kurdish controlled areas of Iraq” have many Islamists residing in the areas, and such demographics may boil over in the future resulting in fatal consequences for Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians. The reconstruction of homes, churches, and destroyed Chaldean and Syriac Christian towns in Nineveh Plains has begun, but less than expected aid is coming directly to the



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local churches and organizations actually aiding Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians. About 40-50% of Chaldean and Syriac Christians have returned to their homes and towns in the Nineveh Plains. If the displaced Chaldean and Syriac Christians are not immediately returned to their homes in the Nineveh Plains, Iraq, then Christianity will be extinct in Iraq in less than 10 years. There are Iraqi Christians who want to stay, but since so many of their fellow Christians have left the country and very little aid is coming in to reconstruct the destroyed Christian towns, they see no hope and also want to leave. Since the Chaldean and Syriac towns in the Nineveh Plains have been liberated from ISIS, Iranian-backed militias are forcing a demographic change in towns such as Bartella, Iraq, which is an indigenous Syriac Orthodox Christian town. **The Iranian-backed militias' and Kurdish Security Forces' attempted takeovers of the indigenous Christian towns and lands in Nineveh Plains, Iraq, are the most severe threats facing Iraqi Christians today.**

A. What Iraqi Christians Want: Overall, Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians want to live in a more secular, nationalistic Iraq where we are treated as equal citizens under an Iraqi Constitution that is not based on any religious supremacy. **The rewriting of the Iraqi Constitution, where all Iraqi citizens are treated equally without different rights for any religion or ethnic group, is the only feasible way to achieve this point.** Prior to 2003, Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians could travel, live, work in any area of Iraq; now, the country has become very limited for Iraqi Christians with the community only able to live in small areas in the northern part of the country and even then with constant instability and violence. Chaldean and Syriac Christians of Nineveh Plains do not want a separate militia guarding their towns but want the opportunity to be part of the Iraqi National Police Forces in order to guard their own towns in the Nineveh Plains. Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians are constantly denied these opportunities as further discussed by Chaldean Christians of Alqosh, Iraq, under the attached Exhibit B. In addition to securing our own towns through local police forces, Chaldean and Syriac Christians of Nineveh Plains want more local governance – similar to how other indigenous communities around the world are allocated the opportunity to preserve their own land, language, culture and traditions within a communal setting.

B. Oppression from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and its' Security Forces: The Chaldean Christians living in the town of Alqosh, Iraq, and the other areas of Northern Nineveh Plains, who do not belong to the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), are living in extreme fear and under oppression and persecution due to the KRG's Asayish security forces (see attached Exhibit B – "Plea for Help From Chaldean Christian of Alqosh, Iraq"). During our team's recent trips to Iraq, various residents of Alqosh were pleading with us to help get the Peshmerga and Asayish forces out of the town and out of Nineveh Plains. The town of Alqosh



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and surrounding areas have become a prison for Chaldean Christians, due to the KRG-KDP and their violent security forces. In the past year, there have been several cases of KRG's Asayish forces arbitrarily arresting Christians, beating/torturing Christians in custody, and threatening Christians. In July 2017, Mr. Al-Jahwary was removed from his post as the Mayor of the Alqosh District by the Nineveh Provincial Council, which we confirmed from several sources is a KDP-controlled entity. While our team was conducting an investigation into the matter, we interviewed a high-ranking member of the KDP who confirmed directly to us that in the summer of 2017, high-ranking officials of the KDP held a meeting in which it was agreed that Mr. Al-Jahwary would be removed from his position by forcing the Nineveh Provincial Council to vote against him. When these KDP meetings were held in the summer of 2017, Ms. Lara Yousif, a KDP member, allegedly asked the KDP to allow her to replace Mr. Al-Jahwary. The KDP plan to forcibly remove Mr. Al-Jahwary and replace him with Ms. Yousif was due to the fact that Mr. Al-Jahwary refused to help the KRG-KDP break-up Iraq. For several years, the KDP attempted to force the Nineveh Province to become part of the "Kurdish Region of Iraq." Given that the Alqosh (Shekhan) District is just south of the Dohuk Province, the KDP would need the mayor of the district to agree. Mr. Al-Jahwary, knowing full well that the KRG planned to seek independence in the future, refused for years to allow his district to become part of the "Kurdish Region of Iraq"; insisting that the district must stay with the Central government (as part of Iraq). The KDP plan was agreed to and put in place through the KDP-controlled Nineveh Provincial Council in July 2017, as the Council headed by Bashar Kiki voted to remove Mr. Al-Jahwary from his position and replaced him with Lara Yousif. The lives of Chaldean Christians in Alqosh have been under constant threat from the KRG and their security forces ever since. On numerous occasions, we documented evidence of the Kurdish Regional Government's Asayish security forces kidnapping, beating-up/torturing, and threatening with violence Chaldean Christians in the towns of Alqosh and Tesqopa in Northern Nineveh Plain.

C. Iranian-backed Militias: A deal was brokered between the Iraq Central Baghdad Government and the KRG over the security of the Nineveh Plains, Iraq, post-ISIS liberation; but, Chaldean and Syriac Christian leaders were not included in this backroom deal and Iraqi Christians are not sure who made/approved this deal on our behalf. The deal was made between the parties without the local indigenous Christians' knowledge or consent. The illicit deal violated our rights as the indigenous people of Iraq and violated international law as well as Iraqi law. This backroom deal has become a cruel nightmare for Chaldeans and Syriacs of Nineveh Plains. **A direct consequence of this nightmare, illegal deal is the deliberate, forced, and problematic demographic changes occurring to the indigenous Iraqi-Syriac Christian town of Bartella, Iraq, by the Iranian-backed Shabak militias.** Chaldeans and Syriacs have lived in the Nineveh Plains area of Mesopotamia for thousands of years, even prior to becoming



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Christians in the first century AD, after being forcibly settled in the area as captives. There are Syriac and Chaldean churches and monasteries in the Nineveh Plains that go back to the era of 200AD and 300AD. Most importantly, within the Nineveh Plains, the native language of Mesopotamia is still spoken; such language is referred to as Chaldean-Aramaic (a/k/a East Syriac). This language goes back thousands of years to the last native empire of Mesopotamia – the Chaldean Kings in 539BC. One of the strongest ways that indigenous communities survive and continue their cultures is through the ability to live within their own communities with other members of the same indigenous group and to practice their language, culture, and faith. If Nineveh Plains (including Bartella) and other indigenous towns in Mesopotamia are not preserved, then Iraq stands to lose all traces of its native Chaldean language and the ancient Christian culture of Iraq. Less than thirty (30) years ago, the entire village of Bartella was a native Iraqi-Syriac town. The ancestors of the natives of Bartella have lived there for thousands of years. After 1990, former President Saddam Hussein forcibly gave away farming land in Bartella to the Shabak community, against the will of the native Iraqi-Syriacs, and began a process of forcibly changing the demographics of these native Mesopotamian towns in Nineveh Plains. Since the liberation of Bartella from ISIS, Iranian-backed Shabak-Shia militias are trying to completely change the demographics of Bartella and force the indigenous Syriac Christians out of the area. The Shabaks militias are stealing goods from the homes of Christians, barging into Syriac Christian homes and assaulting the homeowners, and threatening and intimidating Christians. Shabaks have 70 villages and a lot of land in close-proximity areas; yet, they are insisting on forcibly expanding their homes and territory around the Christian towns of Bartella, Qaraqosh and the other Chaldean and Syriac Christian villages east of Mosul. All homes in the Christian villages have been robbed and the testimony from the ground in Iraq is some of the thefts have occurred after the ISIS liberation of the towns with evidence leading towards the Iranian-backed Shabak militias. We first began documenting the nightmare in Bartella, Iraq, in May and June 2017, and have consistently reported the forced demographic changes in Bartella to the Iraqi Government and other governmental bodies with no changes in the situation.

D. Religious and Economic Discrimination: Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians face rampant employment discrimination throughout Iraq, including in the Kurdish Regional Government, due to our Christian faith. This discrimination includes lack of access to job opportunities, promotions, and under-employment due to our Christian faith. The persecution and oppression of Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians increases every year in Iraq. An example is the Kurdish Regional Government, sadly and unfortunately, taking advantage of the fact that Chaldeans and other residents of the Nineveh Plains, Iraq, are genocide victims and too weak politically to stand-up against the Kurdish authorities' acts of aggression, violence, harassment, and illegal land confiscation. The KRG authorities are also illegally drilling for oil in several



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areas of Nineveh Plains against the wishes of the local indigenous Christians. This is even though the Nineveh Plains falls under the authority of the Central Baghdad Government and outside the authority of the Kurdish Regional Government. Chaldean, Assyrian, and Syriac Christians continue to face land grabs by Kurdish tribes and Kurds associated with the Kurdish Regional Government in Duhok, Zakho, Nineveh Plains, and Mosul, Iraq.

Recommendations for USCIRF as it relates to Iraqi Christians:

- 1. In order to support the religious freedom of Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians, the U.S. Government should advocate for the Iraqi Government and Kurdish Regional Government to designate the remaining Chaldean, Syriac, and Assyrian towns throughout Iraq as indigenous areas with special protection against confiscation, threats, interference by outsiders in terms of policing and governing of the indigenous areas.**
- 2. The U.S. Government should continue to advocate for the removal of both the PMU and the Kurdish Security Forces (Peshmerga and Asayish) from Nineveh Plains, Iraq. In addition, Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians want to guard our own towns through local police forces in the Nineveh Plains. In order to facilitate the training and salaries to the local Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christians that have signed up to become police officers in the Nineveh Plains, the U.S. Government should redirect some funding from the Iraqi Military to the training and salaries for these local indigenous Christian communities.**
- 3. In order to remove sectarianism and promote Iraqi nationalism, the U.S. Government should further encourage the Kurdish Regional Government to incorporate its structure within the overall Iraqi structure and remove sectarian ethnonationalist factions to the KRG's ruling structure. In addition, the U.S. Government should assist Chaldeans and other Iraqi Christian communities in gaining equal rights under the Iraqi Constitution by pushing for the Iraqi Constitution to be redrafted according to principles of equal citizenship, freedom of religion, fairness and justice.**



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Exhibit A

Brief Summary on Iraqi Christians:

Iraqi Christians consist of Chaldeans, Syriacs, Armenians, Assyrians, and Arab Christians, with Chaldeans representing the largest group at 80% of the worldwide number of Christians from Iraq. Most Iraqi Christians are Catholics, with a smaller percentage belonging to the Orthodox denomination and a small number of Protestants. A 1987 Iraq census placed the number of Christians in the country at 1.4 million. In 2003, there were 1.5+ million Christians living throughout Iraq, from as far north as Zakho to as far south as Basra, Iraq. There are currently an estimated 250,000 Christians remaining in Iraq. Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Assyrians speak languages derived from Akkadian and Aramaic languages; Aramaic is the language spoken by Jesus Christ, and the oldest continuously spoken language in the world. Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and Armenians were converted to Christianity in the first century AD by Apostles.

A. Who are Iraqi Christians:

- i. **Chaldeans (80% of Iraqi Christians):** Majority of Iraqi Christians are Chaldeans who are native to Iraq and descendants of the ancient Mesopotamians. Chaldeans speak Chaldean-Aramaic; also known as the Chaldean language, which derives from Akkadian-Babylonian and Aramaic. Chaldeans lived throughout Iraq prior to 2003. Some of the Chaldean towns in Iraq are Tel Keppe (a/k/a Telkaif), Batnaya, Alqosh, Baqofa, Tesqopa (a/k/a Telskuf), Karemlash, Ankawa, Araden, Mangesh, Duhok (certain areas), Zakho (certain areas), and Inshik. Chaldeans are members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, headquartered in Baghdad, Iraq. The Chaldean Catholic Church is a successor Church to the Church of the East founded in Mesopotamia (Iraq) in the first century AD. His Beatitude Chaldean Patriarch Cardinal Louis Rafael Sako currently heads the Chaldean Catholic Church and leads the Chaldean people; his official title is "Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans." The largest population of Chaldeans outside of Iraq, is in Detroit, Michigan area, where an estimated 200,000 Chaldeans live, and in San Diego, California, where along with other Western states another 100,000 Chaldeans live.
- ii. **Syriacs (10% of Iraqi Christians):** Iraqi Syriacs make up around 10% of the global population of Iraqi Christians; this includes both the Syriac Catholics (8%) and the Syriac Orthodox (2%) members. Syriacs are also descendants of the ancient Mesopotamians and speak a dialect of Aramaic known as Syriac, which originated in Syria and Southern Turkey. The three largest Syriac towns in Iraq are all in the Nineveh Plains: Qaraqosh, Iraq (a Syriac Catholic town of 50,000 population pre-ISIS), Bashiqa, Iraq (a Syriac Catholic town of 10,000 pre-ISIS; although Yazidis are the majority in Bashiqa), and Bartella, Iraq (a Syriac



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Orthodox town of 20,000 population pre-ISIS). His Beatitude Patriarch Joseph III Yonan is the head of the Syriac Catholic Church and based in Lebanon; His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II is the head of the Syriac Orthodox Church and based in Syria. The largest population of Syriacs is in Syria and Europe; in the U.S., the largest population of Syriacs live in the New York area.

- iii. **Assyrians (5% of Iraqi Christians):** Assyrians make up 5% of Christians from Iraq. Most of today's Assyrians are from Iran, followed by Turkey. After the 1915 Ottoman Genocide against indigenous Christians, some of the Assyrians native to Iran and Turkey fled into Iraq, while others went to Syria and Lebanon. Assyrians are also descendants of the ancient Mesopotamians and speak Assyrian-Aramaic. Assyrian towns/villages are in the Duhok and Zakho area of Iraq. Assyrian towns in Iraq include Barwar, Baznaya, Sarsing, and Nahla. There are two Assyrian Churches: Assyrian Church of East (headquartered in Erbil, Iraq); and the Ancient Church of the East (headquartered in Baghdad, Iraq). Both of the Assyrian Churches were originally headquartered in Turkey, but after WWI they were forced to flee. The largest population of Assyrians are based in Chicago, where an estimated 80,000 Assyrians live, plus there is a considerable population in Los Angeles, California.
- iv. **Armenians (3% of Iraq's Christians) and Arab Christians (2% of Iraq's Christians):** Most Armenian and Arab Christians live in large cities, such as Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. Armenians are native to Anatolia (known today as Turkey). Armenians have been living in Mesopotamia (Iraq) for several hundred years, while a portion came into Iraq as refugees after the Armenian Genocide of WWI. Armenians speak the Armenian language, and most Armenians belong to the Armenian Orthodox Church, but a minority of Armenians belong to the Armenian Catholic Church. In 2014, ISIS drove out the remaining Armenian and Arab Christians from Mosul, Iraq (as well as driving out the remaining Chaldean and Syriac Christians from Mosul). According to the Armenian community, there were roughly 40,000-45,000 Armenians in Iraq in 2003; today, there are about 4,000 remaining Armenians in Iraq.

B. Iraqi Christian towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq.

There are 9 major Christian towns in the Nineveh Plains, Iraq; 6 of them are Chaldean Catholic towns and overseen by local Chaldean leaders/Chaldean League and the Chaldean Catholic Church. The remaining 3 are Syriac Christian towns. Pre-ISIS the Syriac towns were run by local governors/Mayors and the corresponding Syriac Church. Since ISIS left, the Shabak-Shia militias have taken away local self-governance away from the Syriacs in Bartella, Iraq, and are attempting to forcibly change the demographics of Bartella and the other native Christian towns in the area. For the Chaldean towns in Northern Nineveh Plains, the security has been divided up between the Peshmerga forces (who are in Tesqopa, Baqofa, and Alqosh), and the



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Iraqi PMU Babylon Movement (a group run by a Chaldean named Rayan Al-Kaldani) who has taken over the security in Tel Keppe and Batnaya. Chaldeans and Syriacs want these forces to leave the area, to keep the Nineveh Plains united, and to return local self-governance, including regarding security, to the leaders of these towns with assistance from an international force or the Iraqi Army (non-PMU).

There are smaller Christian towns in Nineveh Plains, but these are the 9 major ones:

- i. **Chaldean towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq:** Tesqopa, Batnaya, Tel Keppe, Baqofa, Karemlash, Alqosh (all North of Mosul, except for Karemlash which is Southeast of Mosul). All of these towns were taken by ISIS, except for Alqosh, Iraq. Tel Keppe used to be an entirely Chaldean town, but now it is 60% Arab Sunni and 40% Chaldean. The remaining towns mentioned are entirely Chaldean Catholic towns.
- ii. **Syriac towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq:** Qaraqosh (Syriac Catholic town), Bartella (Syriac Orthodox town), and Bashiqa (Syriac Catholic town; although, as noted above, Yazidis make up the majority in this town); all 3 are Southeast of Mosul.

Please feel free to contact the Iraqi Christian Foundation with any questions or requests for further information at +1.248.602.0509 or at info@iraqschristians.org.



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Exhibit B

Plea for Help from Chaldean Christians of Alqosh, Iraq

August 10, 2019

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

We the indigenous Chaldean Christians of Alqosh, Iraq, are living in a prison of persecution enforced by the Kurdish Regional Government's security forces and we urgently need your help as our brothers and sister in Christ. Please help us! The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and their security forces - the Peshmerga and Asayish - are forcibly imposing their will and power on all of the institutions that belong to the Nineveh Province (the district just South of the Dohuk Province), Iraq, since the absence of the Iraqi Federal Government in the historic Chaldean Catholic town of Alqosh and other towns in Nineveh Plain, such as Sheikhan and Faida. These areas have historically enjoyed local self-rule under the overall control of the Iraqi state. In July 2017, the KDP forcibly removed the Mayor of the Alqosh District in Iraq, Mr. Faiz Al-Jahwary, and replaced him with a KDP imposed member, Lara Yousif Zara. Mr. Faiz Al-Jahwary supported and defended the rights of Iraqi Christians to our ancestral lands as the indigenous people of Iraq and pushed for equal rights for all Iraqi citizens under the constitution. The KDP opposed Mr. Al-Jahwary's fight for indigenous and equal rights for Iraqi Christians. The vast majority of the people of Alqosh supported Mr. Jahwary as the Mayor and oppose Lara Yousif Zara. The majority of the residents of Alqosh have expressed their refusal towards the KDP policy of illegally implementing Lara Yousif Zara, as the residents knew full well this would mean that the Kurdish Regional Government would forcibly impose their will upon the indigenous Iraqi Christians and would control everything in the area.

Below are some points as to how the KDP and Kurdish Regional Government have implemented a plan of controlling the indigenous Iraqi Christian area of Alqosh and surrounding areas in the Nineveh Plain:

1. Controlling the resources of the town by allowing Peshmerga and Asayish to steal the gas resources from the local gas station away from the indigenous Christian residents of Alqosh.
2. Forcibly taking away the government seals of the heads of various towns in the area and demanding that these heads of towns use the government seal of the Kurdish Regional Government instead.
3. The KDP and Kurdish Regional Government have politicized the Nineveh Municipal Council, which is outside the authority of both.



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4. The KDP and Kurdish Regional Government are interfering in the Christian schools in Alqosh and surrounding areas which are under the authority of the Iraqi Federal Government.

5. The Peshmerga are harassing, intimidating, and threatening indigenous Christians at the checkpoint between the Chaldean Christian towns of Batnaya and Teleskuf in the Nineveh Plain. The Peshmerga should not even be at this checkpoint as it is outside the authority of the Kurdish Regional Government. The Peshmerga are also stealing and blocking all goods that the Christian residents of Alqosh buy from Mosul, Iraq. They are using threats, extortion, and harassment to terrorize the indigenous Christians of Alqosh and surrounding areas in the Nineveh Plain.

Here are some points as to what the illegally implemented Lara Zara Yousif is doing to the Christian residents of Alqosh and surrounding areas:

1. Against the will of the majority of the Alqosh residents, Lara Zara Yousif has demanded that the Kurdish Regional Government takeover Alqosh and forcibly make it part of their government instead of remaining as part of the Nineveh Province. Alqosh and surrounding areas are of great historical importance to the Chaldean Christian community and the majority of the residents as well as the diaspora have rejected repeated attempts by the Kurdish Regional Government to annex the area.

2. There are multiple valid claims that Lara Zara Yousif is using her illegal role to engage in financial transactions to benefit herself over the rights of the indigenous Christians of Alqosh.

3. On multiple occasions Lara Zara Yousif is using the Asayish security forces (the KRG's version of Republican Guard's Intelligence Services used to control the citizens through fear and violence in violation of our human rights) to arbitrarily arrest, beat/torture, and threaten Christians in custody. This has happened on multiple occasions to Christians in Alqosh since she was illegally placed in her position in July 2017. Anyone who opposes her tactics, the tactics of the Peshmerga or Asayish security forces, or advocates for the rights of the Christians as the indigenous people of Nineveh Plain is immediately arrested by the KDP security forces and subjected to beatings/torture, threats, and harassment. Sadly, Chaldean Christian residents of Alqosh and Teleskuf are being arbitrarily arrested, beaten/tortured, and threatened with the full knowledge of some local Christian religious leaders who reside in Alqosh. These local religious leaders have been given a brand-new home paid for by the KRG in exchange for their silence. The residents of Alqosh will not concede our civil and political matters to religious leaders; their affection for the KRG and knowledge and approval of the beatings and arrests do not override our human rights and our ancestral rights as the indigenous people of Alqosh.

Since July 2017, the Christians of Alqosh and surrounding areas in Nineveh Plain, Iraq, are living in a prison forcibly imposed upon us by the KDP and Kurdish Regional Government. We urgently ask our brothers and sisters in Christ to help free us from this prison of persecution. We ask that



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KRG's security forces (Peshmerga and Asayish) immediately leave Alqosh and Teleskuf. We ask that the Iraqi Army and local police be allowed to maintain the security of our indigenous areas. We have over 1,000 men from Alqosh ready to become police officers, under the authority of the Iraqi Federal Police, to oversee the security of Alqosh and Teleskuf. Please help us to secure our own indigenous areas of Iraq before we completely lose them to the KRG or others.

God bless you,

Your brothers and sisters in Christ in Alqosh, Iraq