



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

ISSUE BRIEF: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CHALLENGES IN IRAQ 10 YEARS AFTER ISIS'S GENOCIDE

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Religious Freedom Challenges in Iraq 10 Years after ISIS's Genocide

Overview

Ten years ago, the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) began its campaign of *genocide* against Iraq's religious and ethnic *minorities*. Throughout the summer of 2014 and beyond, the U.S.-designated *terrorist* group systematically *targeted* Iraq's Yazidis; Assyrian-Syriac-Chaldean and other Christians; Shi'a Muslims of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, such as Shabaks, Turkmen, Arabs, and Kurds; and other religious groups. These *genocidal* acts and crimes against humanity included mass executions, mass rapes and sexual enslavement, abductions, forced conversions to Islam, forced conscriptions into ISIS's forces, and other atrocities.

Since ISIS's loss of territorial control in 2019, the Iraqi federal government (IFG) and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have taken some measures to address the genocide's ongoing effects on religious minority groups and their ravaged villages and provinces. While some of these laws and programs showed initial promise, neither government has adequately implemented them. Further, both the IFG and KRG have continued policies and laws or advanced new ones contributing to the ongoing disenfranchisement of many of the religious minority communities ISIS targeted.

This report provides an overview of ISIS's genocide and other crimes against Iraq's religious minorities beginning in 2014. It also highlights ongoing religious freedom challenges facing these communities 10 years later and identifies ways the United States can encourage the IFG and KRG to improve religious minority groups' security and freedom of religion or belief today.

2014: ISIS's Genocide and Other Crimes against Religious Minorities

ISIS formed in 2013 as an *outgrowth* of several reorganizations of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), an Iraq-based terrorist organization affiliated with the global Al-Qaeda organization. While Al-Qaeda leadership at that time sought to attack U.S. targets, AQI had a sectarian Iraqi focus, attacking fellow Iraqi Sunni Muslims perceived as apostates or alleged collaborators with Iraq's Shi'a Muslim-led regime. As the government continued to favor Shi'a Muslim political concerns over Sunni interests, and as the Syrian civil war progressed, AQI expanded within Iraq and into Syria. In 2013, the organization rebranded as ISIS. Its goals broadened toward the recreation of a caliphate—an Islamic state with a supreme ruler over the global population of Sunni Muslims.



In June 2014, shortly before ISIS declared a caliphate, its forces advanced into northern Iraq. The region is religiously diverse. Christians of Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean churches and Yazidis regard parts of it as their ancestral Mesopotamian homeland. Shi'a Muslims of Arab, Turkmen, Shabak, Kurdish, and other backgrounds are also religious minorities within parts of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and greater northern Iraq. In contrast to the religious diversity of Iraq and Syria, ISIS's vision of a global caliphate is Salafi-jihadi and Sunni supremacist, with no tolerance for other religious traditions, including those of other Muslims.

In early June 2014, ISIS attacked the Nineveh governate in northern Iraq and by June 10 had wrested control of Mosul, the capital, from the Iraqi military. Approximately 500,000 people fled Mosul as ISIS murdered and expelled Shi'a and Christian civilians and killed at least 1,000 Shi'a Muslim [prison](#) inmates. Some [estimates](#) indicate ISIS executed, displaced, or trafficked as sex slaves 60,000 Christians in Mosul alone. Beginning on June 12, 2014, ISIS captured and executed approximately 1,700 Shi'a Iraqi adult male soldiers, cadets, and volunteers from the Tikrit Air Academy (formerly Camp Speicher). ISIS leadership reportedly gave fighters [instructions](#) to offer "repentance" to any Sunni men at Tikrit but to identify and murder Shi'a men.

ISIS's civilian Shi'a Muslim victims included many ethnic Shabaks and Turkmen. As culturally distinct cohorts, each with Shi'a and Sunni populations, Shabaks and Turkmen have collectively suffered both religious- and ethnic-based disenfranchisement in Iraq. Through ISIS's

ideological lens, Shabaks may carry the additional stigma of practicing Shabakism, a syncretic form of Muslim spiritualism. During ISIS's attacks on Mosul and Tal Afar, the invaders reportedly [marked](#) people's homes with letters identifying their religious background, singling them out for execution. The letters often reflected derogatory terms for these religious groups.

Turkmen representatives report that ISIS vandalized Shi'a mosques and raped Shi'a Turkmen women before murdering them and burning their bodies. This pattern of desecration of both houses of worship and human remains reflected ISIS's hostility toward Shi'a Muslims as perceived apostates from or refuters of ISIS's Salafi-jihadi brand of Sunni Islam.

In August 2014, ISIS continued to push back defensive Kurdish Peshmerga forces and attack religious minorities, taking over Assyrian towns in the Nineveh Plains and forcing the mass displacement of their Christian inhabitants.

Also in August, ISIS advanced on Sinjar, the Yazidi homeland in Nineveh, and murdered, kidnapped, or drove out almost of all of Sinjar's approximately 400,000 Yazidis, summarily executing at least 12,000 people—especially men and older women—and dumping their bodies in mass graves. Fighters demolished Yazidi shrines and seized boys and young men for forced conversion to Islam, enslaved labor, and conscription into ISIS's ranks. ISIS also abducted over 6,000 younger women and children and sold them into sexual slavery and forced marriage to its leaders and fighters, whose religious framework permits the rape of "infidels" such as Yazidis.

Yazidi communities maintain a collective memory of 73 separate mass-killing events various actors have waged against them over millennia. ISIS's systematic atrocities against Yazidis reflect a longstanding militant Salafi animus toward Yazidism as a Zoroastrian-inflected religion, perceived as “devil worship.”

In 2017, Iraqi forces, backed by a U.S.-led coalition, waged and won the battle of Mosul, retaking the city from ISIS. In 2019, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS—including the United States and local partners in Syria—achieved its territorial [defeat](#) of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

U.S. and International Recognitions of the Atrocities

On March 14, 2016, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a [resolution](#) finding that ISIS's crimes against religious minorities in Iraq and Syria constitute genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. On March 17, 2016, then Secretary of State John Kerry declared that ISIS had committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Yazidis, Christians, Shi'a Muslims, and others. The Iraq and Syria Genocide Accountability Act of 2018 ([Public Law No. 115-300](#)) authorized U.S. government agencies such as the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide relief for Iraqi and Syrian religious and ethnic minority victims of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes and to provide for accountability for perpetrators.

In June 2024, on the 10th anniversary of the Tikrit Air Academy massacre, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) [concluded](#) the mass murders reflected ISIS's “consistent and uniform genocidal policy against Shi'as of Iraq, as a group” and that they additionally constituted crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Some countries have also [repatriated](#) and [prosecuted](#) some of their citizens who traveled to Syria, married ISIS fighters, and facilitated acts of genocide or crimes against humanity against abducted Yazidi women and children.

Ten Years On: Ongoing Religious Freedom Concerns for Iraq's Religious Minorities

In the 10 years since ISIS began its reign in northern Iraq, the religious and ethnic groups it targeted have faced a prolonged humanitarian crisis and numerous challenges in rebuilding their communities. For many survivors, recovery from the psychological effects of genocide and crimes against humanity is a long-term and often individual process, while a variety of other critical factors

have required the prompt and sustained attention of government institutions.

Both the IFG and KRG have taken steps to address these challenges. For example, the Kurdistan Region has received hundreds of thousands of internally displaced religious minority survivors of ISIS and helped recover abducted Yazidi women and girls. In 2020, the KRG and IFG, which have conflicting claims to several northern territories, including Sinjar, entered into the UN-brokered Sinjar Agreement, in part to stabilize and secure the area for displaced Yazidis' return. In 2021, the IFG passed the landmark Yazidi Survivors Law to provide reparations for Yazidi, Christian, Turkmen, and Shabak female survivors of ISIS's sexual violence and some male survivors of abduction and mass killings. In July 2024, the KRG announced plans for psychological support programs for Yazidis as well as a “monthly donation” financial assistance program for Yazidi survivors of ISIS, beginning with 3,000 Yazidi women and girls.

The administration of Prime Minister Mohammed Shi'a al-Sudani has also recognized Yazidis' residential ownership rights in Sinjar and allocated parts of the federal budget toward infrastructure and rebuilding projects. In February 2024, it announced the creation of a Ministry of Justice [committee](#) to hear religious minorities' property-related claims.

In July 2024, the Karkh Criminal Court in Baghdad issued a death sentence against one of the wives of the late ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The court found the unnamed wife facilitated ISIS's kidnapping of Yazidi women from Sinjar and was complicit in detaining Yazidi women in her home.

However, 10 years since the onset of the genocide, seven years since the liberation of Mosul, and five years since the final territorial defeat of ISIS, the IFG and KRG have not adequately [implemented](#) these and other remedial measures. While some survivors have successfully applied for and been granted regular reparation stipends under the Yazidi Survivors Law, many potential applicants have reported difficulties meeting unduly burdensome evidentiary [requirements](#). Likewise, key provisions of the Sinjar Agreement remain largely unimplemented, notwithstanding the Nineveh Provincial Council's appointment in July 2024 of a new Sinjar mayor. Other threats to religious minorities, such as abuses by IFG-affiliated militias and lack of genuine political representation, have evolved from the aftereffects of ISIS's regime. They further disenfranchise the communities ISIS attempted to destroy.

Prolonged Internal Displacement

Both ISIS's initial invasions and the ensuing conflicts between ISIS and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS have forced religious minorities out of Iraq as refugees or permanent emigrants. Neighboring countries responded to the ISIS crisis by hosting hundreds of thousands of the estimated six million Iraqis who fled outside its borders. Recent estimates suggest between 4.8 million and five million displaced people have *returned* to Iraq. However, within Iraq, almost 1.2 million Iraqis of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds remain internally displaced a decade later. Many displacement camps in the KRI have populations primarily composed of religious minorities targeted by ISIS, including Yazidis, Christians, and Shabaks. While some religious minorities have attempted to rebuild their communities in northern Iraq, both pressing security concerns and the still-abysmal state of critical infrastructure and housing destroyed during ISIS's siege have prevented the return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Sinjar remains an inhospitable zone for Yazidis, many of whom have spent the greater part of the last 10 years in displacement camps in the KRI and federal Iraq. Current estimates indicate that at least 183,000 remain displaced today. Yazidi genocide survivors fear returning to a district with damaged and substandard infrastructure and public services, dominated by warring militias, and under constant threat of airstrikes and drones from Turkey, which regularly attacks northern Iraq in search of suspected Kurdish terrorists. In July 2024, the Nineveh Council selected a new mayor of Sinjar, Saido Khairi, from among five Yazidi self-nominated candidates. The election of a mayor fulfills one provision of the 2020 Sinjar Agreement, although whether this process involved consultation with Yazidi communities as *urged* by USCIRF is not clear. Additionally, some reports suggest political interference from state-affiliated militia leader and U.S.-designated human rights abuser Rayan al-Kildani played a role in the mayor's appointment. Several other key provisions of the Sinjar Agreement related to security, infrastructure, and administration remain unfulfilled.

Since the formation of a new federal government in 2022, the IFG has sought to shut down all displacement camps in both federally administered areas and the KRI, with the goal of reintegrating camp residents into Iraqi society. International humanitarian organizations objected to the IFG shutting down the last camp in federal territory in April 2023, citing inadequate support for departing camp residents and unsuitable conditions in the areas to which they would return. Possibly in response to such objections, the IFG postponed its July 30, 2024, deadline

for the closure of 23 remaining camps in the KRI. Iraq's Ministry of Migration has stressed that the government will not forcibly close the camps or expel residents and that it will provide each family among the 155,000 mostly Yazidi camp residents with four million Iraqi dinars (approximately \$3,000) for reconstruction costs. The Ministries of Transport and Education have also announced employment incentives, such as reserving certain types and proportions of jobs for returnees. However, Yazidi advocates have characterized the one-time payment and other reintegration incentives as meager given Iraq's considerable financial resources.

Religious minority IDPs who have returned to their home districts and villages face the additional challenge of social reintegration with existing communities and other IDPs. In 2023 and 2024, as the IFG closed camps across Iraq, minority communities experienced social friction with Sunni Muslim Arab camp returnees who had perceived or actual former links to ISIS. Some returning Sunni Muslim families have expressed apprehension over their reception and reintegration into diverse societies in which some religious minority survivors of ISIS may reflexively regard Sunni Arabs as threats.

Missing Religious Minority Survivors of ISIS

The UN estimates ISIS may have created over 200 *mass graves* to dispose of the bodies of its victims, many of whom were religious minorities. Discovery and excavation of mass graves is a long and expensive process. In July 2024, authorities removed the remains of 139 presumed ISIS victims from the Alo Antar hole pit, a natural desert cavity west of Mosul that ISIS fighters turned into a mass grave. Testimonies and grave artifacts suggest most of the Alo Antar victims were Yazidi and Shi'a Turkmen from in or near Mosul. Turkmen sources report that out of 400 remaining missing Turkmen, only 40 have returned. Advocates urge the Iraqi government to seek out and excavate more mass graves that may contain the bodies of murdered Turkmen.

In addition to missing Yazidis who may be buried in mass graves, up to 2,700 Iraqi Yazidi women and girls whom ISIS abducted are still missing. As ISIS likely forced most of these women and girls into slavery or marriage to fighters, many are presumed hidden in ISIS family detention camps in Syria or in other ISIS enclaves.

Assyrian community sources have reported that at least 200 Christian women and girls ISIS abducted from the Nineveh Plains have returned to their families. Some suggest at least 30 Christian women of both Iraqi and Syrian nationality remain missing after their 2014 and 2015 abductions and likely forced marriages to ISIS

fighters. The Assyrian Church of the East reports one of its members remains hidden in northeast Syria's Al-Hol detention camp following her abduction and successive forced marriages to ISIS fighters.

Discovery and rescue of kidnapped women and girls calls for a set of complex and often sensitive operations, benefiting from coordination between the IFG, KRG, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria, a U.S.-allied coalition of Syrian Kurdish-led forces that administer detention camps for ISIS fighters and their families. The U.S. Consulate has [praised](#) the KRG for its role along with Yazidi survivors and activists in recent successful rescue efforts. However, 10 years on, the window of time to find and rescue women and girls is narrowing.

Threats from State-Affiliated Militias

In 2014, several communities, including religious minorities, formed local militias to defend their populations against ISIS and help the Iraqi government reclaim territory from the would-be caliphate. However, in the years since ISIS's territorial defeat, many such militias have not disbanded. Some have joined or been coopted into an extensive state-affiliated network, while others have built identities as alternatives to state-linked militias. As a result, both state-affiliated and independent militias have increased in power and distribution across the country. Many of these militias target religious minorities with checkpoint harassment, property appropriation, extortion, detention, and torture. In addition, the fallout from competing militias perpetuates post-ISIS destabilization of religious minorities' communities.

Today, the most powerful of these armed groups threatening religious minorities are part of the government-linked umbrella organization, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF/PMU), or al-Hashd al-Shaabi. Although the PMF includes members of a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, the organization's center of power is Shi'a Muslim and increasingly sectarian. Many PMF brigades are affiliated with the largely Shi'a-run government of Iraq, which subsidizes their salaries, and they draw their membership from the Shi'a-majority population of federal Iraq, capitalizing on support from Shi'a religious and political leaders in neighboring Iran. Even some PMF militias with non-Shi'a leaders—such as Rayan al-Kildani, the Chaldean-background founder of the 50th Brigade, or Babylon Brigade (Kataib Babiliyoun)—align largely with Shi'a-centric Iraqi and Iranian political interests. The United States has [designated](#) al-Kildani as a “serious” human rights abuser in part for his targeted violations against religious minorities, including some who share his Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriac Christian background.

In recent years, the Babylon Brigade has waged a multifaceted campaign in Baghdad as well as northern regions to claim the properties and usurp the political leadership of Chaldean, Assyrian, and Syriac churches and communities.

Currently, the government has allowed for the folding of some community-supported Christian militias into the 50th Brigade and other nominally Christian PMF brigades, an arrangement many religious minority communities find unacceptable. Some advocates for members of the Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean churches believe the Nineveh Plains Protection Unit (NPU) and other local defensive Christian militias should be linked directly to the federal Ministry of Defense, not to the PMF brigades that continue to violate Christians' religious freedom.

In July 2023, President Abdul Latif Rashid [revoked](#) a prior administration's decree that had acknowledged the administrative authority of Cardinal Louis Raphaël Sako, the patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church. The revocation effectively stripped Cardinal Sako of his custodianship of Christian property endowments. Reports indicate Rayan al-Kildani, whose Babylon Brigade seeks control of Christians' valuable properties, helped guide the president's decision. After almost one year, during which Cardinal Sako sought refuge in the KRI, Prime Minister Sudani officially [recognized](#) the patriarch's authority.

The IFG has not sufficiently curbed the power of the Babylon Brigade and other PMF units that violate the rights of religious minorities. Al-Kildani's brigade continues to use military force and acts of violence against the Christian communities it claims to represent. In March 2023, Christian communities in Hamdaniya district, accompanied by factions of their defensive militia, the NPU, successfully resisted a takeover attempt by the 50th Brigade and Osama al-Kildani, Rayan's brother. In July 2024, Archbishop Benedict Younan Hano of the Syriac Catholic Diocese of Mosul sent a letter to Prime Minister Sudani pleading for the IFG to intervene against “unruly forces” keeping many displaced Christians from returning to Mosul and the Nineveh Plains. The archbishop cited the recent assault—believed to be by the Babylon Brigade—of a church guard and military officer in the Nineveh governorate. Also in July, Rayan al-Kildani reportedly removed at least 15 sitting mayors and district leaders in the governorate, attempting to replace them with Babylon Brigade-affiliated appointees. Religious minority advocates believe al-Kildani intends to secure PMF administrative and political dominance over the last Christian- and Yazidi-controlled areas outside of the KRI, including Syriac-

Assyrian-Chaldean cities in the Hamdaniya District, Tel Kef, and Sinjar.

In July 2024, Turkmen advocates expressed concern over the PMF's decision to dismantle the Turkmen Force and merge it with another unit. Turkmen civil society members stress the benefits of community militias' formal links to higher-level military forces in Baghdad and support the Ministry of Defense's integration of Turkmen militias.

Other PMF brigades pose specific threats to Yazidis. Young Yazidi men in Sinjar, desperate for protection and income, face PMF and other militias' additional [pressure](#) to join their ranks, contributing to further community fragmentation and exposure to violence.

Deficiencies in Minority Political Representation

Many religious minorities in Iraq perceive the PMF's growing political power and their communities' lack of adequate representation as aftereffects of ISIS's destruction and as factors fueling their decisions to emigrate permanently from Iraq. Religious sectarianism, which increased after the 2003 U.S. ousting of Saddam Hussein, has continued to rise in the aftermath of ISIS's religiously divisive ideological and genocidal campaign.

Although both the federal and KRI parliaments have allotted parliamentary and provincial council quotas for certain minority communities, or "components," communities have consistently objected to their inadequacy. The quotas are limited in number and designated for only some of Iraq's many religious and ethnic groups. In addition, quota seats are increasingly dominated by minority candidates often more representative of the concerns of the large Shi'a Arab or Sunni Kurdish majority constituencies than those of their own home communities.

Minority advocates argue that large religious or ethnic voting blocs and parties overlook or exacerbate many issues of concern to their small communities, including ISIS-induced challenges. "Token" religious minority politicians or civil servants aligned with them create further challenges. In the current electoral system, voters who reside outside a given geographic constituency are eligible to cast votes for minority quota candidates from that area. As a result, winning minority candidates often represent the interests of the majority religious or ethnic votership that propelled them to power, rather than providing a needed dissenting voice. As such, religious minority communities often have no viable political path to resist or propose alternatives to laws and policies that disproportionately harm religious minorities, such

as the personal status law requiring Christian children's [conversion](#) to Islam if one of their parents has converted.

The federal provincial elections in December 2023 and the federal Supreme Court's rulings in February 2024 affecting the Kurdish parliament's quotas further limited religious minorities' political representation in both the federal and KRI systems. The IFG's quotas for the Provincial Council reserved 10 total seats for Christian, Sabean-Mandaean, Faily Kurd, Yazidi, and Shabak components. Many Christians expressed alarm over the election results, which reflected the ability of Shi'a-majority voters in southern Iraq to vote for Christian quota representatives for northern provinces. This system resulted in Christian-background members of the political arm of the PMF's Babylon Brigade sweeping all four Christian quota seats in Baghdad, Nineveh, Kirkuk, and Basra.

The February 2024 federal Supreme Court rulings likewise dramatically [limited](#) the political representation of Iraqi religious minorities, this time in the KRI's parliamentary system. In a pair of legal decisions, the court declared as unconstitutional the 11 Kurdish parliament minority quota seats for Assyrian and Armenian Christians and Shi'a and Sunni Muslim Turkmen. To protest the court's rulings, religious minorities and some Kurdish political parties announced a boycott of the upcoming Kurdish parliament elections. In May 2024, the court handed down a new decision restoring five minority quota seats in the Kurdish parliament to Christians and Turkmen. However, Assyrian community members have objected to the reduced overall number of seats as well as the redistribution allotting more Christian seats to the KRI governorates with smaller Christian populations.

Turkmen community advocates point out that the electoral power plays of 2023 and 2024 reflect a recent history—accelerated by ISIS's genocide—of both IFG and KRG political exploitation of religious minorities. Many Turkmen of all religious backgrounds feel a lack of political autonomy as the large Sunni and Shi'a Kurdish and Arab political factions across Iraq use Turkmen leaders and constituencies to maintain majority blocs' own power. Tokenism and electoral machinations of this kind have potentially contributed to the government's lack of progress on post-genocide rebuilding and justice and accountability efforts.

Ongoing Deprivation of Land, Houses, and Worship Sites

Ten years after ISIS's destruction or seizure of religious minorities' homes, houses of worship, and agricultural

lands, many communities remain dispossessed of their property and sacred sites. The IFG and KRG have promoted the reconstruction of certain Yazidi [villages](#) and Christian [houses](#) of worship. Differing forms of [worship](#) have meant that some of ISIS's victims, such as Christians and Shi'a Muslim Shabaks and Turkmen, have been able to continue their observances even in IDP camps and villages outside their home territories. In contrast, Yazidis' and Kakai's' ongoing separation from shrines and sacred sites in their ancestral lands has limited their freedom of worship.

Religious minorities forced to flee ISIS's onslaught also left behind many privately owned lands and properties damaged or appropriated by ISIS or, later, Kurdish or Arab residents. Christians in the KRI or adjacent disputed territories continue to protest the KRG's failure to adjudicate many outstanding claims of properties that private citizens or KRG officials have reportedly appropriated from Christian owners. Many owners are still displaced in other parts of Iraq or have returned from displacement or temporary emigration to find that authorities have perpetrated or allowed the seizure of their lands and houses.

In 2022, the IFG formally recognized for the first time in 50 years Yazidis' ownership of their houses in Sinjar. Nevertheless, the district's network of warring militias have appropriated some properties, while other houses remain uninhabitable due to essential infrastructure deficiencies following ISIS's destruction.

Conclusion

In the 10 years since ISIS's genocide and crimes against humanity against Iraqi and Syrian religious and ethnic minorities, survivors have faced numerous challenges in rebuilding their communities and achieving substantive freedom of religion or belief. In 2024, many religious minorities still live under the shadow of ISIS, Iraqi and Kurdish authorities share responsibility for prolonging or exacerbating many aftereffects of ISIS's crimes, and ISIS itself remains [active](#) in Iraq and Syria.

While the government of Iraq and the KRG have taken initial steps toward acknowledging the genocide and offering restitution to survivors, their progress remains slow and their implementation inadequate. As a result, many genocide survivors live in long-term internal displacement, often separated from their hometowns or regions, houses of worship, and properties. Increasing numbers of Christians, Yazidis, and other minorities have permanently emigrated from Iraq. They are discouraged by the IFG's and KRG's failures to root out abusive militias, improve chronically poor security conditions, and reform political systems that further disenfranchise survivors. The continued erosion of religious minorities' presence in Iraq and Syria constitutes a grave threat to the region's millennia-long history of religious diversity. Ultimately, it has also helped advance ISIS's goal of religious and cultural extermination of these communities in their ancestral homelands.



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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