

How the Interim Constitution of Iraq Betrayed the Assyrians

Ann-Margaret Yonan
California

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Now that the interim constitution of Iraq has been signed and made public, we can see that the Interim Government Council committed genocide against the Assyrians by stripping their national, cultural, linguistic, and historical rights.

The Assyrians, the indigenous people of Iraq, were not even mentioned as a nationality in the new constitution, with the exception of occasional references to Catholic Assyrians, (ChaldoAssyrians). This means that Assyria is no longer considered an ethnic identity, rather it is now known as a religious group, and can consequently be denied all national rights entitled to other nationalities in Iraq, such as the Arabs, the Kurds, the Turkomans, and even the Armenians. This fact is eluded to in ARTICLE 30-C, "The electoral law shall aim to achieve the goal of having women constitute no less than one quarter of the members of the national assembly, and having fair representation of all "communities" in Iraq, including the Turkomans and Chaldo Assyrians". The language of the constitution clearly identifies the minorities, such as Turkomans and ChaldoAssyrians as communities, not nationalities.

In ARTICLE 53-A, the constitution writes "The Kurdistan Regional Government is recognized as the official government of the territories that were administered by that government on 19 March, 2003 in the governorates of Dohuk, Arbil, Sulaimaniyeh, Kirkuk, Diyala and Nineveh". Further to that, the law in ARTICLE 46-B provides the following guarantees to the federalism of Kurdistan, "the decisions of regional, local courts, including the courts of the Kurdistan region, shall be final". The constitution also stipulates in ARTICLE 54-B that "with regard to the application of federal laws in Kurdistan region, the Kurdistan national assembly shall be permitted to amend the application of any such law within Kurdistan region".

These acts subjugate all Assyrians of Northern Iraq to the Kurds and places their national identity under the full authority of a new nation called KURDISTAN. Now the Kurds can dictate when, where, how, and when Assyrians can practice their cultural, linguistic, national, religious and academic rights. Nineveh, the first ancient Assyrian capital is now a Kurdish province, according to the interim constitution. Item A, therefore spells genocide against the Assyrian national, linguistic, and territorial rights and integrity. To the extent that only Assyrians are the indigenous people of Iraq, and therefore the rightful owners of those territories, this act is UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

The statement written in ARTICLE 4 "The federal system shall be based upon geographical and historical realities" actually makes the act of giving Dohuk, Arbil, Kirkuk, and Nineveh, (the geographical and historical homelands of the indigenous Assyrians) to the Kurds INVALID. Assyrians can PROVE these provinces were originally created, developed and maintained by the Assyrians, so what right does the interim constitution have in giving these territories to the Kurds? Thousands upon thousands of Assyrian artifacts prove these cities are Assyrian

cities. Hundreds upon thousands of scholars, Assyriologists, and history books prove these are Assyrian lands. What “geographical” or “historical” proof do the Kurds have that these are Kurdish towns?

ARTICLE 53-A , 46-B and 54-B should concern every Assyrian, as history demonstrates the Kurds have slaughtered the Assyrians every time they have had the opportunity, and this time will be no exception. Beginning with 1918, the Kurds killed the Assyrian leader and patriarch, Mar Benyamin Shummon and have assassinated hundreds of Assyrian priests and monks, and burned down most Assyrian churches and monasteries in these very regions. That's how they were able to vacate these territories and rid them of Assyrians and claim the territories as their own. The Kurdification of Assyrians began around the turn of the century, and continues to this day. The Kurds have even been so bold as to call the Assyrian artifacts that have been recently discovered in these territories as KURDISH ARTIFACTS.

ARTICLE 53-B prohibits any change of territorial boundaries, by claiming “the boundaries of the eighteen governorates shall remain without change during the transitional period”, which means, the Assyrians are discouraged from challenging the territories given to the Kurds.

ARTICLE 53-C is a farce because on the one hand, in item B, the constitution maintains that “the boundaries of eighteen governorates shall remain without change during the transitional period”, in C it claims that “any group of no more than three governorates OUTSIDE OF KURDISTAN”, with the exception of Baghdad and Kirkuk, shall have the right to form regions from amongst themselves.” Pray tell where would that be? What territory is left for Assyrians to form as their region? Even then, “it must be approved by the National Assembly”, in which Assyria is not represented.

ARTICLE 53-D Guarantees administrative, cultural and political rights to minorities, namely, The Turkomans and the ChaldoAssyrians. Notice, that only Catholic Assyrians are mentioned, which means all other Assyrian ecclesial denominations are excluded from this guarantee. Additionally, there is no protection of Assyrian NATIONAL rights. This means they can hold office, open social clubs, vote, but they cannot form a regional nation, independent of Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans. This opens the way to the eventual assimilation of the Assyrians into the overall culture of the region in which they live, and no one can guarantee the survival of their national identity.

Perhaps that is why the Assyrian language is not even mentioned in this interim constitution. ARTICLE 9 cites “Kurdish and Arabic are the two official languages in Iraq”. It additionally guarantees the right of Iraqis to educate their children in other languages. If Iraq's indigenous language, which is “Assyrian” is not part of the school curricula as an official language, then what opportunity would the indigenous Assyrian people have to teach their children their mother tongue?, especially if they are totally subjugated by the Arabs in Central and south Iraq, and by the Kurds in the North?

Furthermore, the Assyrian language in ARTICLE 9 is referred to as Syriac, not Assyrian. Here's a double jeopardy for the Assyrians: Not only is the indigenous Assyrian language considered as non-official, which means it will not be taught in schools or used in professional

environments, but has been completely wiped out from the constitution and replaced with a non-existent language: Syriac! There's no such language. This is totally erroneous and a big distortion of historical facts and evidence.

To sum up the fate of the indigenous people of Iraq , it would appear that President Bush and Paul Bremer were merely giving lip service to the Assyrians, when they both recently reiterated that "Assyrians must be protected".

Nothing in the new interim constitution guarantees the survival of the Assyrian identity, language and territories in the new Iraq . On the contrary, the Assyrians once more, are on the brink of EXTINCTION.