

Religious Freedom Coalition

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STATEMENT OF WILLIAM J. MURRAY, CHAIRMAN OF THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COALITION ON PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ

In 2003, there were nearly [one million Christians in Iraq](#), constituting five percent of the population. These include Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syrians, Armenians, Catholics, and [Protestants](#). The largest Christian groups, the [Chaldean Catholic Church](#) and, in particular, the [Assyrian Church of the East](#), originated in Iraq hundreds of years before the Arab Conquest. In the past year alone, however, between 60,000 and 80,000 ChaldoAssyrian Christians (10% of their total population) have [fled Iraq](#). Other Christians are also fleeing, and last year made up 20% of the total [refugee flow into Syria](#) from Iraq.

Why is this ancient [Christian population fleeing](#)? It is true that all Iraqis are suffering, but Christians are particular targets. In August of 2004, six Christian churches in Mosul were bombed on the same day. Five [churches were bombed](#) in Baghdad on the 16th of October. Christian women are harassed, have acid thrown into their faces, are kidnapped and raped. They seek some safety behind the Muslim hajib (the veil). Many Islamists incorrectly [accuse Iraqi Christians](#) of being agents of the American military or other elements of the so-called “Christian West.” Christian children are kidnapped and held for ransom, and Christian homes or businesses are targeted with bombs.

Iraqi Christians are centered in the major cities, especially Baghdad, but their largest area of concentration is in the Kurdish-dominated North. The [Assyrian Homeland](#) is approximately 82% Assyrian Christian with a total population of 450,000. Kurdish forces [massacred](#) thousands of Assyrians soon after the [Ottomans](#) left, and even today persecution continues. Besides violent attacks, there is a systematic [policy of disenfranchisement](#).

The truly ancient peoples of Iraq – including Mandeans, Turkmen, Yezidis, Shabak, as well as the ChaldoAssyrians and other Christians – are at the breaking point. They have faced varied forms of [persecution](#) ever since the Muslim Conquest in the 7th century, but even harsher measures have been applied in [recent decades](#). Even with an enormous American and Coalition presence, Christians are facing persecution like never before. It would be a disgrace if the ancient Christian population of Iraq disappears under the American watch.

We call upon the President and our Coalition allies to put aside [political correctness](#) and do all possible, both civilly and militarily to protect the Christian minority presence from Islamist oppression.

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