

Table of Contents

- ***ISIS burn Assyrian Woman, 80, in North Iraq***
 - ***What everyone gets wrong about the persecution of Christians in Iraq***
 - ***Islamic State militants blow up Assyrian church in Syria***
 - ***The Genocide of Assyrians that started in Iraq continues in Syria***
 - ***Between the millstones: UNPO releases report on state of Iraqi minorities since fall of Mosul***
 - ***IS publishes Women's Manifesto***
-

ISIS burn Assyrian Woman, 80, in North Iraq

(AINA (26.05.2015) - <http://www.aina.org/news/20150526165910.htm> -- According to a report by the BasNews agency, ISIS burned an 80 year-old Assyrian woman to death in a village southeast of Mosul. Citing Sa'ed Mamuzini, a representative of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) office in Mosul, BasNews stated in its report that the woman, who was from Karamlis, was burned for failing to comply with Islamic Sharia law.

Lying about 10 miles northeast of Baghdede (Qaraqosh), once the largest Assyrian city with a population of 50,000 Assyrians, Karamlis is one of dozens of Assyrian villages in the Nineveh Plains surrounding Mosul, which was partially overrun by ISIS on August 7 of 2014, causing 200,000 Assyrian to flee their villages (AINA [2014-08-07](#)). Nearly all have not returned and are living as refugees in Ankawa and Dohuk.

What everyone gets wrong about the persecution of Christians in Iraq

The Week (10.04.2015) - Media coverage of Christian persecution in the Middle East was once all but non-existent. (A representative headline on this website last year declared, "The world's most ancient Christian communities are being destroyed — and no one cares.") And while awareness of this troubling topic hasn't quite reached Biblical proportions yet, it's certainly increasing. CBS's 60 Minutes devoted several segments to the matter, National Geographic gave it a large spread in their magazine, and most recently, Newsweek devoted their cover story to "the new exodus" of Christians from the Middle East.

The persecution of Christians in the Middle East is a real problem that deserves real attention. Attacks on churches, forced conversions, and executions — including the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians in Libya — have provoked international outcry. Though reports on Iraq vary wildly, it seems that 90 percent of the country's Assyrian-Christians have fled or died since WWII, and as a result of al Qaeda and ISIS, Assyrian-Christians have been reduced to 1 percent or less of the general population. All this caused the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to declare the flight of Christians from the region "unprecedented."

I'm an American Christian living in Iraq. I have been working for nearly a decade to save lives across this war-battered country. I am thankful for those who care about the people in this region who I have come to love so deeply.

That said, any non-sectarian observer who is actually here in Iraq can tell you that these "Whither the Christians!?" headlines are far too simplistic. The situation is more complicated than many American commentators realize. And the hand-wringing headlines may actually make things worse for those who live here.

When ISIS drove Christians out of Mosul in the summer of 2014, the West awoke to the plight of Christians in Iraq. But cramming the diverse group of victims into a tidy box marked "Christian" was not helpful. Locally, most of these "Christians" identify ethnically as Assyrians, and they are talking as much about Assyrian nationalism as religious identifiers like theology or tradition.

Western talk of "Christian persecution" generates more interest than "Assyrian genocide," as it naturally plays into the prepackaged Christianity-vs-Islam motif. But the sectarian fires that this narrative stokes could burn the very Christians — ahem, Assyrians — that Western sympathizers seek to help.

Good advocacy requires good listening, and what the Assyrians are asking for is more than the right to worship. Assyrians want an internationally recognized, self-governed province like their Kurdish neighbors. This is guaranteed to them in the Iraqi constitution, and was approved by the Council of Ministers in Baghdad in 2014. They are fighting a legal, political, and geographical fight for their homeland — not strictly for the right to believe or identify as Christians.

The American Mesopotamian Organization says "the primary mission of the [The Nineveh Plains Protection Unit (NPU)] is to 'protect the remaining Assyrian lands'" and "'liberate the Assyrian homeland of the Nineveh Plain' from the grasp of the radical Islamists," according to Newsweek. The Dwekh Nawsha, a splinter militia founded by the Assyrian Patriotic Party, speaks in similar terms.

Yes, ISIS is ostensibly persecuting Assyrians because they are Christians, but they are more than that. They talk about the pain of historic and recent expropriations by Turks, Kurds, and Arabs, and the fear that their status as a unique indigenous people will be erased by further assimilation. By glossing over the ethnic/nationalistic component of their struggle, American activists risk missing their aims and adding to their pain by wrongly framing the discussion as one of religious liberty alone.

America is a young nation of immigrants, so we do not readily understand identity and faith in terms of land, place, and ancestral heritage. For this reason, I'd expect Americans to read Newsweek's follow-on quote by a British-Assyrian with skepticism: "This is our last stand, if this fails then Christianity will be finished in Iraq."

But this bald assertion is simply taken at face value by the Newsweek author, perhaps because it supports the pre-defined narrative, even though Christians (including Assyrian, Syriac, Chaldean, Anglicans, Protestants, and converts from Islam) still exist and worship in Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, Nasiriyah, Basra, and beyond.

The Assyrian homeland may be forever lost if persecution persists, and this should be feared and fought against. But it need not mean the end of the Christian faith and tradition in the region.

Herein lies the rub: We can't have it both ways. We can't give money to upstart American "charities" that send weapons and vigilantes to fight alongside the NPU and Dwekh Nawsha and pretend that the "Christianity" we're seeking to save is anything other than a deeply complex and entrenched ethnic, political, legal, geographic, and religious battle for land and all the meaning that comes with it.

One militiaman speaking to The Washington Post summed up the dualism that is lost on many Western commentators: "During war times, we are Assyrians. We don't let anyone humiliate us. After the war, we go home to be Christians again."

Assyrians have a constitutional and human right to live in peace inside the borders of their ancient lands. I support their right to fight for their freedom. But that fight should be waged in the name of Assyria, of Iraq, and of humanity. This land has seen enough religious wars.

Islamic State militants blow up Assyrian church in Syria

Barnabas Fund (08.04.2015) <https://barnabasfund.org/news/Islamic-State-militants-blow-up-Assyrian-church-in-Syria?audience=GB> Early on Easter Sunday (5 April), as Christians around the world gathered to remember the resurrection of Christ, Islamic State (IS) militants blew up and levelled a church in Tel Nasri village, situated alongside the Khabur river in north-eastern Syria.

Built in 1934, the church is one of three main churches in Tel Nasri, one of 35 Assyrian villages that line the north and south sides of the Khabur river. These villages are practically empty now after IS fighters raided villages along the south side of the river on 23 February and returned to [attack](#) villages on the north side on 7 March.

They took hostage around 280 Christian villagers, and although some were later released, there is still no news as to the fate of around 260 still being held.

The Christians living in these villages are ethnic Assyrians who speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus. Turned out of their villages and threatened not to return, residents have fled to the nearby cities of Hassake and Qamishli. Barnabas is helping to provide emergency food aid and supplies for 1,200 Christian families who have taken refuge there.

The Genocide of Assyrians that started in Iraq continues in Syria



AINA (27.02.2015) - On Tuesday, February 23 ISIS attacked 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hassaka province in northeast Syria (<http://www.aina.org/news/20150223174904.htm>). At least 9 Assyrians fighters were killed defending their villages. Up to 373 Assyrians were captured. 3000 Assyrians fled from their villages and are now in shelters in Hasaka and Qamishli.

None of the Assyrians want to return. This is what they have told their bishops.

Three weeks earlier, ISIS ordered Assyrians in the region of Hasaka to remove the crosses from their churches and to pay *jizya* (Christian poll tax), warning residents that if they failed to pay they would have to leave or else be killed (AINA: <http://www.aina.org/news/20150203164724.htm>).

The [list of atrocities](http://www.aina.org/releases/20150226225711.html) (<http://www.aina.org/releases/20150226225711.html>) against Assyrians in Syria is very long; it includes murders, kidnappings and the destruction of cultural resources, including churches and ancient Assyrian historical artifacts.

In Iraq it has been the same. With the first church bombing on June 24, 2004 there began a relentless, low grade genocide (Report: <http://www.aina.org/reports/ig.pdf>) which culminated in the displacement of 200,000 Assyrians from the Nineveh Plain by ISIS (Report: <http://www.aina.org/news/20140729115702.htm>). Where the population of Assyrians in Iraq was at 1.4 million in 2004, it has dwindled to 300,000 in 2015. Most fled to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey --and now these same refugees will be forced to flee from Syria, along with the Assyrians of Syria.

ISIS has not only killed and displaced Assyrians in Syria and Iraq, it has destroyed the Assyrian cultural heritage. It has destroyed 118 churches in Iraq (Report <http://www.aina.org/news/20080107163014.htm>) and 6 in Syria. It has destroyed Assyrian archaeological sites and historical artifacts in Iraq and Syria.

This is genocide -- there is no other word for it. This is the erasure of a nation from the land which it has inhabited for 6764 years.

Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide lays down the meaning of genocide:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

To this we can add the destruction of the cultural heritage of a nation, including the destruction of secular and religious institutions and historical and archaeological artifacts.

All of these acts have been committed against Assyrians in Syria and Iraq in the last ten years.

It is ironic that the ISIS attacks on Assyrians in Syria is occurring in 2015, the centennial anniversary of the 1915 Turkish genocide of Assyrians, Greeks and Armenians, in which 750,000 Assyrians were killed (75%), 500,000 Pontic Greeks and 1.5 million Armenians.

This is not a coincidence. ISIS is pretty savvy and is historically informed. When ISIS pushed into the Nineveh Plain in Iraq last year, forcing 200,000 Assyrians to flee their homes, they began their invasion on August 7, which is the official Assyrian Martyrs Day, a day on which each year Assyrians remember their fallen.

How should the civilized world react to this? When a group destroys a nation it destroys the cultural heritage of the civilized world. When the Taliban destroyed the 2,500 year-old Buddhist statues in Afghanistan, the civilized world lost. When ISIS destroyed the walls of Nineveh, the civilized world lost. When ISIS killed Yazidis, the civilized world lost. When ISIS killed Shiites the civilized world lost. When ISIS killed Assyrians the civilized world lost.

And now ISIS is destroying the very foundations of world civilization. It is in Mesopotamia where civilization as we know it began. Destroying Assyrian artifacts is ISIS's message to the world, that it aims to eradicate the very basis of its civilization because it is not Islamic.

There is no moral ambiguity in what is occurring -- ISIS is evil and the source of this evil is Islam.

The civilized world must find the courage to accept the force of its moral superiority and act on it. If it does not, the world will fall into shadow.

There is a dark veil falling on the world and it is Islam as embodied by ISIS. Who has the courage to lift this veil?

Between the millstones: UNPO releases report on state of Iraqi minorities since fall of Mosul

UNPO (27.02.2015) - On 27 February 2015 the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), in collaboration with the Institute for International Law and Human Rights (IILHR), Minority Rights Group International (MRG) and No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), released a breakthrough report capturing the current situation of minority groups within Iraq since the invasion of ISIS. The report follows a fact-finding mission to Iraq in November 2014 that assessed the status of Christian, Kaka'i, Shabak, Turkmen and Yezidi minorities within the country.

The launch conference, held at the International Press Centre in Brussels, was chaired by Mr William Spencer of IILHR. In his opening remarks he described how the investigation and the report had been motivated by the shocking deterioration in the status of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq that have occurred since the invasion by ISIS of Northern Iraq in 2014. He reminded those present that although the report focuses on the role of ISIS in the persecution of minorities, the title of the report, *Between the Millstones*, was chosen to represent the long-standing discrimination that minorities have faced in Iraq; even though their situation has worsened since the involvement of ISIS, they have long suffered at the hands of the Iraqi state.

Ms Mays Al-Juboori from MRG then discussed the major findings of the report. She described how ISIS is one of the greatest sources of anti-intellectualism in the modern world. The group is founded on the principle of eliminating the diversity of cultures and religions that are present in modern Iraq through a process of cultural destruction and religious assimilation. Minorities in Iraq have been marginalised for generations and lack the tribal and centralised state security that members of the Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Shia Arabs enjoy as majority ethnic groups. This means that they are significantly more vulnerable to the will of ISIS, particularly following the campaign of terror and chaos that has accompanied the ISIS invasion.

The floor was then handed to Ms Johanna Green of UNPO who discussed the looming humanitarian crisis which is described in the report. Since the invasion of ISIS in June 2014, there have been more than 2.2 million displaced by the violence and persecution – many of whom belong to minority groups. In addition to the violence and persecution that these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) face, their search for humanitarian assistance is complicated by the loss of legal documents, dispossession of property and shortfalls in humanitarian resources available. Drawing on interviews she had conducted within Iraq, Ms Green described how IDPs often had no warning of the advance of ISIS and had to flee their homes without crucial identification, proper provisions and sometimes even without family members.

These problems often continued to be a problem once IDPs had reached safe areas from where to receive humanitarian assistance. Iraqi and Kurdish bureaucratic discrimination means that minorities are often left without proper assistance or the humanitarian aid they do receive from the state is second-rate. Poor preparation for winter and heavy rains plus deplorable hygiene conditions thus proved a larger problem for IDPs of minority groups – an issue that was further compounded for women whose privacy and hygiene needs are rarely met. Ms Green closed by reminding those present that all of

these issues occur within a humanitarian system that has insufficient funding from the international community and lacks legal provisions within Iraq.

Ms Alison Smith of NPWJ then took the floor giving an indepth analysis of the operations of ISIS within the context of International Criminal Law (ICL) – particularly war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Ms Smith outlined the various violations of ICL that had been committed by ISIS and the contribution that this report and its accompanying field research had made towards gathering evidence on these violations. He further stressed that the report provided evidence to show that 10 of the 16 categories of war crimes identified in ICL had been violated by ISIS in Iraq. These include summary executions, attacking civilians, conscription of child soldiers and incidents of rape. With regards to crimes against humanity, ISIS had committed 10 out of 11 categories provided by ICL. These include murder, enslavement and enforced disappearances. There was also an abundance of evidence to show that ISIS had committed genocide in Northern Iraq from the period of June-August 2014 with high probability that the genocide is still ongoing. Evidence of forced conversions, mass killings and overt statements by ISIS were claimed to be clear evidence to Ms Smith that a case against ISIS leaders can be built in the future.

William Spencer of IILHR was the final speaker and reiterated a point made by Ms Smith, that there needs to be accountability and redress in Iraq if these IDPs are to feel completely safe. Mr Spencer then outlined the key recommendations of the report. He stressed the need for sufficient funding for the international humanitarian effort in Northern Iraq; currently, only 36% of the funding that the UN has said is required has actually been secured from the international community. With this gap in funding, it is easy to see why the tools and resources needed to effectively deal with the humanitarian crisis on the ground have not made it to the field. Systematic corruption within the Kurdish and Iraqi governance structures has also created a serious issue for the humanitarian mission in the area, and until the governments are willing to make convictions, this problem will persist.

Mr Spencer finished by highlighting the fact that ISIS will not continue for ever and at some point Iraq will need to implement a post-ISIS plan of action. All panel members agreed that the international community, including those in Brussels, need to start formulating this plan now so that when ISIS is defeated, there will not be an uncertain climate in Iraq that can cause further problems for minority groups. In summary, no IDPs will return to their homes without a clear sense that they will be safe and be able to fully rebuild their lives. Following the Brussels launch of the report, which particularly targeted European policymakers and media, a second presentation will take place in Washington DC in mid-March 2015 for an American audience.

Media coverage of the report:

[El Economista \(26.02.2015\)](#)

[BBC News \(27.02.2015\)](#)

[De Wereld Morgen BE \(27.02.2015\)](#)

[Katholieknieuwsblad \(27.02.2015\)](#)

IS publishes Women's Manifesto

RFE/RL (05.02.2015) - <http://www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-womens-manifesto/26832051.html> - A manifesto for women published by the Islamic State (IS) group has criticized Western attitudes to women, saying that this so-called "Western model" has failed, that a woman's place is in the home, and that Western women's fashions, like earrings, are the work of the devil.

The **manifesto**, titled Women of the Islamic State, was shared on the Internet on January 23 by the IS group's all-women unit, the Al-Khanssa Brigade. An English version of the manifesto was shared on February 5 by the Britain-based anti-extremism think tank the Quilliam Foundation. It focuses on women's daily lives and the role of women in an Islamic society and in the "caliphate" (the name given by the IS group to the areas under its control).

The overarching message of the manifesto is that women should be "sedentary" while men are characterized by "movement and flux."

Women of the Islamic State does not beat around the bush, but states unequivocally that a woman's "fundamental function" is "in the house with her husband and children."

According to the manifesto, the Western idea that women should be "liberated" from the home has been a failure. This model, which is "preferred by infidels in the West" is a falsehood, according to the IS group, because the Islamic "Prophetic tradition" says that women should not leave the home even for prayer.

"Verily God has ordained this sedentary existence for women, and it cannot be better in any way," the manifesto insists.

The manifesto offers some explanations as to why it is very difficult for women to work outside the home.

"They have 'monthly complications' and pregnancies and so on," the manifesto explains, adding that women also have "responsibilities to their husbands, sons and religion."

Women, Know Your Limits!

Women of the Islamic State also -- unsurprisingly -- criticizes what it says is the Western idea that women should obtain "worldly knowledge" with the aim of trying to "prove that her intelligence is greater than a man's."

However, the manifesto does not say that women should be illiterate, but that God intended them to learn to "read and write about their religion and fiqh [Islamic jurisprudence]."

Studying for university degrees in such useless disciplines as science and other "Western" inventions is clearly a step too far for women, according to the Islamic State treatise, which is scathing about women who "flit here and there to get degrees and so on" and who "study the brain cells of crows, grains of sand, and the arteries of fish!"

Earrings and hair "shaved in some places and not others" are the Devil's work

The Islamic State's manifesto on women also covers the important issue of women's fashion which, unsurprisingly, it condemns as the work of "Iblis" or the devil.

The manifesto conflates jewelry such as earrings with plastic surgery, claiming that the devil encourages vulnerable women to "spend huge amounts of money to change God's creation" including via surgery to alter "the nose, ear, chin and nails."

The devil, according to the manifesto, preys on women in "fashion shops and beauty salons," encouraging them to have "things dangling from ears" and "hair shaved in some places and not others."

Unseen and Unheard

The IS women's manifesto insists that women should not leave the home except in "exceptional circumstances" but says that women can wage jihad in cases where an enemy is attacking her country and there are not enough men to fight.

Women are also allowed to work as doctors or teachers, but only if they observe strict Shari'a Law.

Although women are permitted to go outside in these extreme cases, the manifesto reiterates that, under normal circumstances, women should be unseen and unheard.

"It is always preferable for a woman to remain hidden and veiled, to maintain society from behind this veil," the manifesto says.

It is "legitimate" for girls to be married at the age of nine, the manifesto adds, noting that their husbands should "not be more than twenty years old."

Even if they fail to attract a husband at nine, the manifesto points out that "most pure girls will be married by sixteen or seventeen."

The manifesto ends by detailing some of the horrors that women are forced to endure in Saudi Arabia, where "women are able to work alongside men in shops like banks, where they are not separated by even a thin sheet of paper."

Saudi women are also "allowed to appear in ID photographs," while in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, "males and females are able to mingle in the hallways as if they were in an infidel country in Europe."

HRWF Footnote: The text of the Manifesto in English and analysis can be accessed at <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>
