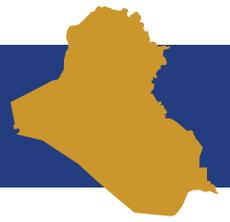




IRAQ



IN DEFENSE
OF CHRISTIANS
IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Iraq is home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Iraq's Christians are ethnically and religiously diverse and practice unique Christian traditions. Denominations include Armenian Catholics and Orthodox, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, Evangelical and Protestant denominations, and the Syriac Catholic and Orthodox churches. These Christians speak different dialects of the ancient Aramaic language as well as Arabic and Armenian.

Prior to 2003, Iraq's Christians constituted one of the largest minorities in Iraq, numbering approximately 1.5 million. By 2014, an estimated two-thirds had fled or been forced out of Iraq, fleeing the sectarian violence that has been rampant since 2003. In 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) swept across northern Iraq, including the heartland of Christianity in Iraq: the Nineveh Plain.

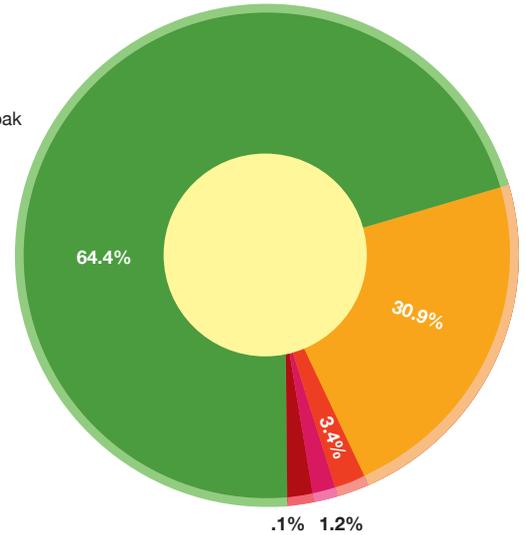
On March 14, 2016, the U.S. House of Representatives voted unanimously "that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria include war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide." On March 17, Secretary of State John Kerry found that ISIS "is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control, including Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims. Daesh is genocidal by self-proclamation, by ideology, and by actions — in what it says, what it believes, and what it does."

In order to protect and preserve Iraq's ancient ethnic and religious minority communities, the U.S. government must emphasize the importance of their presence in Iraqi civil society as a whole and in the Nineveh Plain region, in particular.

ISIS has been pushed back and much of the territory previously occupied by ISIS has been liberated, but the genocide continues. Many of the indigenous religious and ethnic communities targeted by ISIS are still unable to return to their homes – and many, nearly three years later, are still not receiving U.S. aid. Before peace and reconciliation efforts can begin, the victims of genocide must be able to return safely to their homes.

The United States and the international community must take swift action to secure, stabilize, and economically revitalize these communities, as part of a larger effort to stabilize Iraq; to identify and punish those who aided and abetted ISIS in its campaign of genocide and terror; and to appoint to key positions qualified persons who will pursue these and related humanitarian and national security priorities.

- Shia: 64.4%
- Sunni: 30.9% including Kurds
- Yazidis, Kaka'i, Shabak and Yarsans: 3.4%
- Christians: 1.2%
- Mandean: .1%



Recommendations:

- Support the establishment of an interim zone of stability in Iraq—which should include Tal Afar, Sinjar, and the Nineveh Plain—to protect the religious and ethnic minorities of the region who have suffered genocide, including Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Turkmen. These communities yearn for local security, self-governance, and economic self-sufficiency, objectives that also advance U.S. national security interests in the region.
- Provide direct assistance to the survivors of genocide in Iraq, including its indigenous Christian communities. Almost no official U.S. government or United Nations (U.N.) aid has reached the Christian communities. IDC has heard repeatedly from religious leaders, NGOs in the region, and genocide victims that Christians are last in line for assistance from governments.
- Refer the evidence in the State Department's possession of genocidal acts committed by ISIS or its affiliates to the United States Department of Justice and to the U.N. Security Council for criminal investigation, and, in proper cases, for indictment and prosecution in an appropriate legal venue.

