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MINORITIES, DISPLACEMENT AND IRAQ'S FUTURE

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Minorities, Displacement and Iraq's Future*

Introduction

It is no coincidence that many internally displaced persons and refugees are members of minority groups. In every region of the world, minorities have been repressed, killed and displaced by governments and other armed actors seeking to take over their territory, command their loyalty, and control their actions. Sometimes this has occurred in the context of nation-building as governments try to assert national control over areas traditionally ruled by minorities. Sometimes this has taken the form of expelling minorities from a given territory or transferring populations from one region to another to ensure that they do not threaten the regime. [1] Sometimes it has taken the form of ethnic cleansing, defined by some as "rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group."[2] Sometimes minorities are displaced by state-sponsored attacks, as in the forced relocation of Kurds by the Saddam Hussein regime. Sometimes they are displaced by other ethnic groups seeking to reclaim land they once occupied, as in Kenya. Sometimes they are displaced by conflicts between minority groups seeking autonomy and government forces, as in Sri Lanka.

The 1951 Convention on Refugees recognizes persecution on the basis of five characteristics -- race, ethnicity or nationality, religion, membership in a social group, or political opinion – as grounds for refugee status. All of these may be directly related to being an ethnic, religious, or other minority. Moreover, persecution because of political opinion often includes persecution because of opposition to the government in defense of one's minority status. The definition of internally displaced person (IDP) as spelled out in the Guiding Principles is broader than that of refugees, referring to "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border."[3]

In 2001, the UN's Commission on Human Rights expressed concern over "the growing frequency and severity of disputes and conflicts regarding minorities in many countries and their

*An earlier version of this paper was presented to the "Dialogue on Iraqi Minorities," conference organized by George Washington University,18 November 2008

[1] See Monica Duffy Toft. *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003 for an interesting discussion of the relationship between territory and ethnic conflict.

[2] Hayden, Robert M. "Schindler's Fate: Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing and Population Transfers. *Slavic Review* 55 (4) 1996, pp. 727-48.

[3] *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), February 1998. http://www.brookings.edu/projects/idp/gp_page.aspx.

often tragic consequences, and that persons belonging to minorities are particularly vulnerable to displacement through, *inter alia,* population transfers, refugee flows and forced relocation."[4]

This presentation analyzes the relationship between minorities and displacement, with a particular emphasis on the case of Iraq's smaller minorities.

Who are minorities?

While the United Nations has been unable to agree on a standard, universal definition of a "minority," the UN General Assembly, in 1992, adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Article one of this document affirms, "States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity."[5] The protection of minority rights is further incorporated into international law through the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (especially Article 27), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and regional instruments, such as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Minority Languages.[6]

Within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, there is also a Working Group on Minorities, created in 1995 as per Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/31 of 25 July 1995. The Working Group was established as a subsidiary organ of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights to serve as a forum for dialogue and as a "mechanism for hearing suggestions and making recommendations for the peaceful and constructive solution to problems involving minorities, through the promotion and protection of their rights."[7]

NGOs working on minority rights and protection have their own working definitions as well. For example Minority Rights Group International (MRG) works with "non-dominant ethnic, religious and linguistic communities, *who may not necessarily be numerical minorities*" (emphasis added).[8]

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[4] Commission on Human Rights concerning persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, 2001. www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publicatitons/GuideMinorities12en.pdf.

[5] UN doc., *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/d_minori.htm

[6] The major principles upheld in the international law to protect minority rights are non-discrimination and equality and equal treatment and protection by the law. Other fundamental rights and freedoms that are often woven into discussions of the rights of minorities include: freedom from persecution/right to security of person, language rights, and the right to political participation – all of which flow through the international instruments and which also relate to displacement.

[7] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Minorities – Working Group. http://www.unhchr.ch/minorities/group.htm

[8] Ishbel Matheson , Ed. "State of the World's Minorities 2008 – Events of 2007", Minority Rights Group International (MRG). http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=6138n

For the purposes of this paper, the term 'minority' will be used to refer to groups that are normally numerically smaller groups within a given country and who share a common religious, ethnic or linguistic identity. This includes such groups as the Roma across Europe, Dalits and Muslims in India and Afro-Colombians in Colombia.[9] It also often includes indigenous groups for whom displacement is particularly difficult given the fact that their identity, spirituality and culture are often rooted in a particular piece of land.

The idea of a minority is based on an identity defined by society. Yet identity is flexible, fluid, changes over time and depends upon location. For example, Catholic and Jewish Americans are generally considered "white" today, but were not 50 years ago while 'Irish' used to be an ethnic/racial category. There is a tendency in discussing the ethnic, religious, or sectarian communities of a society to assume that all persons fit neatly into a category and that they self-identify as such. However, the reality is much more complex, and the categories employed by local politicians, the international media, and academics are often meaningless to the average citizen, especially where intermarriage is common. Iraq is a good example of the complexities of identity; while Iraqi political leaders and the media routinely describe Iraqis in sectarian terms, it is common to hear Iraqis protest this labeling, saying: "we never thought of ourselves as Sunnis or Shi'a before this. We were Iraqis."

Displacement and minorities

Today nearly two-thirds of all armed conflicts include an ethnic component[10] and frequently members of ethnic minorities are displaced as a result of the conflict. As Roberta Cohen explains, "[I]n far too many countries, ethnic minority groups do not feel an integral and accepted part of the state. Many feel dispossessed and abandoned by the national authorities; their beliefs, culture and language insufficiently respected; and their political and economic interests not fully protected by the institutions of their government. In such situations, all too often, extremist elements within the group turn to violence to reverse power imbalances and achieve the group's aims. Indeed, armed conflicts between governments and ethnic minority groups seeking greater political, economic and cultural autonomy are one of the major causes of forced displacement."[11] There are also many cases where governments have taken the initiative to repress or relocate minority groups in order to prevent a separatist threat or because their view of the nation is of an ethnically or religiously homogeneous one.

Thus, the Soviet Union forcibly deported many ethnic groups from their traditional homelands to other parts of the country in an effort to either punish or forestall separatist movements, including Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachays and Meskhetian Turks. Ethnic

[9] Rachel Baird, "Climate Change and Minorities," *State of the World's Minorities 2008*, Minority Rights Group, 2008, p. 9.
[10] Monica Duffy Toft. *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003, p.3.
[11] Roberta Cohen, "Foreword," in Dilek Kurban/ Deniz Yükseker/ Ayşe Betül Çelik/ Turgay Ünalan/ A. Tamer Aker**,** *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration: Post-Displacement Restitution of Citizenship Rights in Turkey,* Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakf (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) Istanbul: Tesev Publications August 15, 2007. Available at http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/0815humanrights_cohen.aspx?rssid=idp

cleansing was used by nationalist governments in the Balkans who saw ethnicity as a basis of national identity. Ethnic and other minorities have been displaced in order to implement development projects or to secure access to mineral resources, in part because of their marginal political and social position. Non-state actors, including paramilitary groups (sometimes aligned with government forces or economic interests) have also been responsible for displacing minorities.

In many situations, the minority is attacked and displaced, not because they demand equal treatment, but because they are perceived as having preferential treatment at the expense of the majority (such as Tutsis in Rwanda, Sunnis in Iraq). And in some cases there are mixed motives for violence against minorities as in Sri Lanka where minority Tamils were perceived as having a privileged position dating from the colonial period. Efforts by the government to eliminate preferential treatment for Tamils, coupled with violence, led to the formation of independence movements which in turn led to greater repression on the part of the government. Then there are countries without a majority or obvious "minority," such as Lebanon and Kenya. In these cases, multiple group identities exist and compete for resources, often with negative outcomes for multiple communities. Groups can be both victims and perpetrators of displacement at different points in time.

It is also important to keep in mind that violence against minorities is often not occurring at the state level, but rather in local communities. Violence may be targeted against groups who are a minority in a particular province, governorate, or district, but who belong to a majority or plurality on the national scale. For example there were many instances where Sunnis, a minority in Iraq, used targeted violence in 2006-2007 to displace Shi'a families from "Sunni-dominated" neighborhoods in Baghdad. Similarly, in Kenya's 2007-2008 post-election violence, the plurality-group (at 22%) – the Kikuyu – were attacked and displaced by another ethnic group which constituted about 12% of the national population. Yet these national percentages are less relevant in examining the violence on the ground. As in Baghdad, Kenyans who were the local minority were attacked in many areas and fled to regions in which they belonged to the majority.

Displacement and 'nation-building'

Since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, armed conflict between the tribal population and the central government as well as government-sponsored transmigration schemes of Bengalis from the plains have displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The largest number of conflict-induced IDPs are in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, traditionally inhabited by 13 different groups of indigenous people jointly known as the Jumma people. The three largest groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are the Chakma, Marma and Tripura. These tribes are of Sino-Tibetan decent and the majority practice Buddhism with a small Hindu minority.[12] Under the British Administration the tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts enjoyed special autonomous status, where it was prohibited to sell land to non-indigenous people. However, the tribes lost this special status with the independence of Pakistan from the British and despite demanding the return of this special status after Bangladesh's independence, this status has not been restored. Current

[12] IDMC, "Bangladesh: Minorities increasingly at risk of displacement". http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpCountries)/6E57E5E3F7F7952F802570A7004BB1F8?OpenDocument

displacement stems from the government's efforts at nation-building which led to conflicts between the minority groups and Bengali population moving into the area that are primarily Muslim.

In Myanmar, the displacement of ethnic minorities – Karen, Karenni, Shan, Mon, etc. – has been an integral part of the military government's efforts to establish control over areas where ethnic groups traditionally exercised authority. The villages of ethnic minorities have been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced – both internally and into neighboring Thailand.[13] Efforts by the ethnic minorities to resist this control have been brutally suppressed. David Eubanks reports that "in the Karen and Karenni States of eastern Burma, the Burma army regularly launches sweeping operations, involving up to four battalions, in villages and areas where resistance is active and where IDPs are suspected to be hiding. The soldiers will often mortar and machine-gun the village first and then enter the village to harass civilians, loot homes, beat, rape and torture indiscriminately, and sometimes burn homes or entire villages. Landmines are then laid in the village and on the routes that villagers use in and out of the village. If a villager is seen, he or she is shot on sight.[14] The suppression of minorities has been central to the Burmese government's efforts to impose its rule on the country.

The violence in Darfur, Sudan, which has displaced some 2.4 million Darfuris inside the country and led another 250,000 to flee to neighboring Chad has ethnic roots, which are exacerbated – as they often are – by political and economic considerations. In August 2002, the UN Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Sudan noted that in Darfur 'the depopulation of villages, displacement and changes in land ownership are allegedly part of government strategy to alter the demography of the region."[15]

Ethnic cleansing and control

In the Balkans the forced displacement of minorities was an integral part of the struggles to assert control over populations and establish nations based on ethnic identity. Over 2.5 million people were displaced, and today more than 500,000 remained displaced in the region – the majority in Kosovo and Serbia. With the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia both Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991, leading hundreds of thousands of people to leave the new states, resulting in the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. The fighting spread to ethnically diverse Bosnia Herzegovina which in 1992 had a population made up of 44% Muslim (Bosniaks), 31% Serbs and 17% Croatians. When Bosnia Herzegovina declared independence, Serbian forces invaded Bosnia under the premise that they were protecting the Serbian minority. By April 1992 more than 95% of the Muslims and Croatians living in Bosnia had been forced from their homes. Efforts to reverse the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia Herzegovina have had mixed results. The 1998 conflict in Kosovo displaced hundreds of thousands within Kosovo and more than 863,000 fled or were expelled beyond the borders of the

[13] *Forced Migration Review*, no. 30 "Burma's Displaced People", 2008. http://www.fmreview.org/burma.htm Also see Ashley South, RSC Working Paper No. 39 "Burma: The Changing Nature of Displacement Crises", February 2007. http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/PDFs/WP39%20Burma%20AS.pdf

[14] David Eubank, "Attack on a way of life," *Forced Migration Review,* no. 30, 2008, p. 10.

[15] Sharath Srinivasan, "Minority Rights, Early Warning and Conflict Prevention: Lessons from Darfur", http://reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/OCHA-6UTDKT/$file/DarfurMicro2006.pdf?openelement

province. While most of the Kosovar Albanians have since returned, security for the Serbian minority has been precarious and many of those displaced have not returned. With minorities in this region still unclear about the future of Kosovo, many displaced have failed to return to their places of origin.[16]

In the early 1990s, ethnic Abkhaz separatists seeking independence from Georgia implemented a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Georgians – which formed the largest single ethnic group in Abkhazia, making up almost 46% of the population. [17]More than 250,000 ethnic Georgians were forced to flee Abkhaz territory and approximately 30,000 people were killed during armed conflict.[18] Conflict in South Ossetia in 1991-92 also resulted in displacement of ethnic Georgians. The vast majority of these displaced Georgians remained in limbo for some 15 years, unable to return to their homes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and yet often prevented from integrating into Georgia proper by leaders intent on using them as a bargaining chip to oppose the separatist movements. Advocating for local integration or settlement in another part of the country is often perceived as an endorsement of ethnic cleansing, as well as acquiescence that it will not be reversed. As long as the possibility was kept alive that the displaced Georgians would one day return to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian government was able to maintain its territorial claims. The recent military confrontation between Russia and Georgia (August 2008) led to the displacement of the entire ethnic-Georgian population from contested areas in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (except for the Gali district in Abkhazia.) It has also severely impeded any prospects for large-scale return of the long-standing IDPs from the early 1990s. However, the increased attention and international humanitarian funding may have paved the way for greater assistance the IDPs who have lived in protracted situations for many years.

Displacement and economic interests

In Colombia, the displacement of between 2.5 and 4 million people has disproportionately affected minorities, particularly Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities. The conflict, fought between a complex array of armed forces, including guerrilla groups, government troops and paramilitary groups, produced high civilian casualties and triggered widespread displacement. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has stated, the minorities "are located in territories that are strategic in the dynamics of the internal armed conflict and partly because they have suffered from discrimination and marginalization. In addition, they have also been affected by large-scale productive projects imposed on their collectively held territories and by legislation unfavorable to traditional forms of production, by the development of major infrastructure projects – such as dams which can negatively impact the environment – and by the aerial spraying of illegal crops."[19] As the Colombian military has destroyed fields used to

[16] "Bosnia and Herzegovina" and "Kosovo", IDMC, accessed on November 11, 2008. http://www.internal-displacement.org

[17] While the Georgians are often presented solely as the victims of these wars, their calls of "Georgia for the Georgians' in the periods before and during the conflicts indicated that they too had territorial ambitions.

[18] US Department of State, Country report on Human Rights Practices for 1993,, Abkhazia case. Also Svetlana Mikhailovna Chervonnaia, *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia Abkhazia, and the Russian Shadow*. Gothic Image Publications, 1994.

[19] IDMC, *IDP Voices*, "Colombia: The rights of indigenous peoples, minorities, peasants", http://www.idpvoices.org/80257297004E5CC5/(httpPages)/586E41A1CBE4BBB1C12572F70056AA3A?OpenDocument. See also: Washington Office on Latin America, "Chemical Reactions": A WOLA Report on the Failure of

produce illicit drugs, narcotics traffickers have sought to shift their production to more inaccessible areas – areas traditionally populated by indigenous people and Afro-Colombians. Similarly economic interests have sought to dispossess indigenous groups, often holding collective title through traditional means, in order to produce palm oil for ethanol production. A study by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center of two communities in Chocó in northwestern Colombia found that in 2005, more than 90% of the land planted with oil palms belonged to displaced Afro-Colombian communities. "There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the [oil palm] companies have taken advantage of the violent displacements committed by paramilitary groups to encroach on collective land belonging to Afro-Colombian communities."[20]

Ethnic conflict, civil war, and displacement

Civil wars which have torn apart countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia have often degenerated from conflicts fought on political or ideological grounds to struggles between warlords seeking control of territory and natural resources. In the process, ethnic minorities are often particularly vulnerable. For example, most observers attribute the violence in Somalia to inter-clan warfare. In most cases, the Minority Rights Group reports, "civilian victims are targeted simply because of their clan identity." But minorities in Somalia face particular risks both because they have been targeted by all sides and because their social and economic marginalization makes them especially vulnerable to the effects of the conflict.[21] They have faced discrimination and exclusion and have had their lands confiscated. Allying with various clans, they have suffered war and retaliation by other armed groups.[22]

The table below, adapted from *State of the World's Minorities 2008,* indicates a rank order of countries in which peoples, primarily minority groups, are under threat. It is no surprise that almost all of these countries have high levels of internal displacement.

Rank	Country	Group	Number of IDPs/Refugees
1	Somalia	Darood, Hawiye, Isaaq and other clans; Ogadenis; Bantu; Gabooye (Midgan) and other 'caste' groups	1,100,000/455,357
2	Iraq	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkomans, Christians, Mandeans, Yazidis, Failli	2, 778,000/2,279,247

Anti-Drug Fumigation in Colombia, 8 April 2008.
http://www.wola.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=viewp&id=669&Itemid=2

[20] "Resisting displacement by combatants and developers: Humanitarian Zones in north-west Colombia", Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), November 2007 p. 18
http://www.protectionline.org/IMG/pdf/Colombia_SCR_Nov07.pdf

[21] Mark Lattimer, "Peoples under Threat," *State of the World's Minorities 2008,* Minority Rights Group International, 2008, p. 49.

[22] IDMC, "Minorities in Somalia: a history of segregation and land expropriation" (Aug 2002) http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(httpEnvelopes)/AACF67A9177FD9EF802570B8005AAB23?OpenDocument

		Kurds, Sabak, Baha'is, Palestinians	
3	Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Dinka, Nuer and others in the South; Nuba, Beja	6 million/523,032
4	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkomans, Baluchis	Over 200,000/1,909,911
5	Burma/Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	503,000/191,256
6	Democratic Republic of Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hunde, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Twa/Mbuti	1.4 million/370,374
7	Pakistan	Ahmaddiya, Baluchis, Hindus, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis, other religious minorities	Undetermined/31,857
8	Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	Undetermined/13,902
9	Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	200,000/59,832
10	Chad	'Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	185,901/55,722

Source: Mark Lattimer, "Peoples under Threat," in *State of the World's Minorities,* Minority Rights Group: 2008, p.50. Refugee and IDP figures from: "Global Statistics", Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Accessed on November 11, 2008. "Global Trends 2007", UNHCR, Accessed on November 11, 2008.

Minorities in Iraq

Estimates of the number of minorities in Iraq are conflicting, but the best estimate of Iraq's pre-2003 ethnic/sectarian composition seems to be:

*CHRISTIANS
2003: 1- 1.4 million
Now: 6-800,000[23]

[23] "Whilst there is no accurate data on the size of the Christian community, hundreds of thousands are believed to have fled the country since the US-led 2003 invasion. There were around 800,000 Christians in Iraq in 2003," according to Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako. (IRIN, "IRAQ: More food aid needed for displaced Christians – official")
In 1987 the Iraqi census listed 1.4 million Christians, but today only about 600,000 to 800,000 remain in the country, most on the Nineveh plain. (Charles Annock, "The Assyrians: Ignored Among Fears of an Iraqi Civil War," http://www.christiansofiraq.com/assyriansignored.html) The Department of State reported there were almost 1

* JEWS
    2003: a few hundred
    Now: 10-15
* MANDAEANS
    2003: 30,000
    Now: fewer than 13,000[24]
* PALESTINIANS
    2003: 35,000
    Now: 15,000
* TURKOMANS
    2003: 800,000 claimed
    Now: as low as 200,000[25]
* YAZIDIS
    Before 2003: not known
    Now: about 550,000[26]

Kurds and Sunni Arabs (other than Kurds) each made up around 20 percent of Iraq's population in 2003, thus making them numerical minorities in the country. However, their situation is considerably different than that of the estimated ten percent of Iraq's population which is made up of smaller minority communities, including religious minorities such as Armenian, Syriac, and Chaldo-Assyrian Christians; Baha'is; Jews; Mandaeans; and Yazidis as well as ethnic minorities such as Faili Kurds, Palestinians, Shabaks, and Turkomen. [27] Most of these groups have long histories of living in Iraq and most (though not all) enjoyed a degree of protection as minorities under the Saddam Hussein regime.

As the situation of Kurds is quite different than that of the smaller minority communities, they are treated only briefly here. This community faced multiple forms of violence and persecution, often alongside smaller minority groups. However, Iraq's Kurds have had a dramatically different position in the post-2003 era. Although there are major unresolved issues for the Kurdish community, it is likely that they will be continue to be a major player in Iraq's future – an assertion which cannot be made about the country's smaller minority groups. However, it is notable that the fate of Iraq's smaller minorities seems in some aspects to be tied to the struggle of Kurds for greater autonomy.

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million in early 2003 while UN sources claimed the figure to be 700,000. Still another source reports that "one in four Christian families living in the major Iraqi cities has left." (Keith Roderick, "Iraq's Christian Exodus" National Review Online.) http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=NjF1ZTIyYjZjYjk1NmZhZTc2MmUxNzJjZmI4ZTI) In August 2006, Chaldean Auxiliary Bishop Andreos Abouna of Baghdad stated that of the estimated 1.2 million Christians living in the country before the invasion, only 600,000 remained. (US Department of State, "Iraq" *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90211.htm)

[24] 5,000 according to testimony of the US commission on International Religious Freedom, 25 July 2007, http://www.uscirf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1378&Itemid=1. The State Department noted that the Sabean-Mandaean community was down to 5-7,000 in 2007.

[25] Patrick Cockburn, "'Exodus' of Iraq's ancient minorities", http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/exodus-of-iraqs-ancient-minorities-437939.html

[26] Ibid.

[27] Preti Taneja, *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's Minority Communities since 2003*. Minority Rights Group International, 2007, p. 3.

Kurds

Iraqi Kurds were clearly a minority under the Saddam Hussein regime who took numerous measures to repress them. Until the 1980s, the Kurds made up some 25% of Iraq's population, living mainly in the northern part of the country.[28] Many lived in the so-called "mixed-population belt"[29] stretching through Mosul and Kirkuk. This was a target of Saddam Hussein's Arabization campaigns and Operation Anfal, both of which sought to permanently alter the ethnic demographics of these oil-rich lands. During the Arabization campaigns, some 250,000 Kurds and other non-Arab minorities were displaced from this territory and replaced by Arabs from central and southern Iraq. Operation Anfal of 1988 was an ethnic cleansing campaign carried out by the government in which 100,000 Kurds were killed and other hundreds of thousands were rendered homeless.[30] The program of Arabization continued in Kirkuk until the eve of the Ba'ath regime's toppling; throughout the 1990s, Kurds and other non-Arab Kirkukis continued to face harassment and pressure to change their ethnic identity and join the Ba'ath party.[31] During this period, 120,000 persons were driven out of Kirkuk and other territory under Baghdad's control.[32]

After the ouster of Saddam Hussein, many Kurds returned spontaneously to their homes and others were encouraged to do so by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) which saw their return as key to the re-establishment of Kurdish rule in the region. But in many cases the returning Kurds found their homes occupied by Arabs who had resettled there from southern and central Iraq. Those Kurds that cannot reclaim their homes remain displaced inside Kirkuk governorate, waiting for the day when they will be able to recover their lost property and houses. But the Kurds are not the only minority group seeking to assert territorial claims to Kirkuk. The Turkoman communities in particular argue that they are victims of Kurdish efforts to dominate the region.

While clearly a persecuted minority under the Saddam Hussein regime, the position of the Kurds has changed over the past five years. They participated actively in drafting the constitution which allowed them to include certain key issues into this document, such as Article 140 which provides for a referendum in Kirkuk. They have benefited from proportional representation and have 53 representatives in Parliament (out of a total of 230 seats allocated to the provinces)[33] and the President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, is a Kurd. They have consolidated their control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), in part through encouraging the return of Kurds from

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[28] Human Rights Watch, Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds, A Middle East Watch Report, New York, July 1993. http://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/

[29] International Crisis Group, "Iraq and the Kurds: The Brewing Battle over Kirkuk," *Middle East Report*, no. 56, 18 July 2006.

[30] David Romano, "Whose House is this Anyway?: IDP and Refugee Return in Post-Saddam Iraq," *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 4, 2005.;"Iraq: Forcible Expulsion of Ethnic Minorities," Human Rights Watch, Vol.15, No.3, March 2003. Human Rights Watch, "Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq," Vol. 16, No. 4, August 2004.

[31] Human Rights Watch, "Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq," Vol. 16, No. 4, August 2004.

[32] Ibid.

[33] "Iraq's Legislature" *The Washington Post*, 2006. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/custom/2006/01/26/CU2006012601551.html

other part of the country, but also through the development of a strong military force, the Pesh Merga, and by consolidating Kurdish control of government services. The three provinces making up the KRG – Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk – have emerged as an area of relative calm and stability in Iraq. It has also become an area where the exercise of Iraqi central authority is weak as evidenced by Kurdish being the dominant language and Kurdish flags replacing Iraqi flags.

Very few Kurds have sought refuge in neighboring countries since 2003; those who have felt unsafe in other parts of Iraq have tended to move to the KRG region. UNHCR-Syria's figures, for example, suggest that there are very few Kurdish Iraqi refugees in Syria. While there is no comprehensive data, of the 219,010 Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR, only 1.5% are Kurdish.[34]. Similarly, among the total number of Iraqis registered in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey, less than 1% are ethnically Kurdish.[35] It is difficult to know whether this percentage would be similar among the 1.5 million Iraqis in Syria or the 2 million plus in the region.

Many questions remain about the future of the Kurds, particularly around the future of Kirkuk and other disputed territories[36] and about the relationship of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq with Kurdish movements in neighboring countries. However, the Kurds have become a major political player in Iraqi politics and, in this respect, are in a very different position than the smaller Iraqi minorities.

Micro minorities

While the Kurds have seen an improvement in their relative position on the national political scene, the situation is very different for the smaller minority groups who have suffered disproportionately from the post-2003 violence and, as a result, have fled in large numbers. Iraqi minorities are a heterogeneous group. Some are religious minorities, some linguistic minorities, some ethnic minorities, and some are a combination. Some were persecuted under the Ba'athist regime – such as the Baha'is and Fayli Kurds – while some, such as the Palestinians, were privileged by the regime. Most have lived in Iraq for more than 1,000 years. Some, like the Jews, have almost completely disappeared, while the Palestinians have been trapped and unable to leave the country. What they have in common is that they consider themselves to be minorities, they have virtually no political power, and they have all been persecuted, harassed, and targeted for violence.[37]

[34] UHNCR Syria Update, August 2008.
http://www.un.org.sy/forms/publications/files/UNHCR%20Syria%20Update_August%202008%20-%20FINAL.pdf
[35] UNHCR Statistical Report on registered Iraqis in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt, 25 September 2008.
http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=491959312
[36] Elizabeth Ferris and Kimberly Stoltz, "The Future of Kirkuk: The Referendum and Its Potential Impact on Displacement", Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, 3 March 2008.
[37] See "Iraq presidency approves provincial election law", AFP, 3 October 2008.
http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jmCIE2FFs11op0y2IsDmholhQZQw; and Preti Taneja, *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's Minority Communities since 2003*. Minority Rights Group International, 2007.

The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration in Iraq estimates that nearly half of the minority communities have left the country. UNHCR estimates that 30% of Iraqi refugees seeking sanctuary in Jordan, Syria and elsewhere are from minority groups.[38]

Attacks have occurred against all minorities; religious minorities have faced forced conversion, attacks, intimidation, and murder. There are reports that al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has demanded protection money from Christian families and that Christian women are punished for not wearing the veil. Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army, for example, issued a letter to Christians in Baghdad ordering Christian women to veil themselves.[39] On the other hand, in comparison with some of the other small minorities, Christians have the advantage of being linked to an international Christian movement which can advocate for them as Pope Benedict reportedly did when he met with President Bush in 2007.

Christians seem to be at particular risk because of their ties with the West and thus by association, with the multinational forces in Iraq. The fact that Christians, along with Yazidis, traditionally dominated the alcohol industry also made them a target in an increasingly fundamentalist Islamic environment. In the past two months, Christians in Mosul have been increasingly targeted, leading many thousands to flee the city. Iraqi Christian refugees in Syria gave accounts of gunmen dressed in police uniforms targeting their community by vetting Iraqi national identification cards, which contain information on tribal and religious affiliation. There were reports that Iraqi Christians were forming ad hoc militias to protect their neighborhoods and other reports that some Christians were blaming Kurds for organizing the attacks.[40] In many cases the motivation behind attacks on Christians is religious – to drive the minority out of Iraq -- but often criminal groups or bandits pretend to belong to a jihadist group in order to mask the fact that their motive is money. Christians are regarded as having money and are known to sacrifice everything to pay ransom demands – partly because they do not have powerful tribal or militia links to protect them.[41]

UNHCR reported recently that, of the 2,000 plus families that fled Mosul in October, about 1,000 were from Al Hamdaniya area. This neighborhood has seen about one third of the displaced families return in the last couple of weeks, but most have done so out of fear for their job security or children's access to education. While the security presence has been boosted (35,000 Iraq Security Force and national police are currently stationed in Mosul), many displaced families still feel that it would be unsafe to return.[42] The Iraqi government pledged

[38] See Ellen Massey, "Iraq's Religious Minorities Hit from all Sides," 1 August 2007, http://www.antiwar.com/ips/masseyphp?articleid=11378. See also "UNHCR Statistical Report on registered Iraqis in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt," UNHCR, 25 September 2008.
[39] Keith Roderick, op cit., p. 2. Also see, Kathleen Ridolfo, "Iraq: Christian population dwindling due to threats, attacks," Radio Free Europe, 31 May 2007. http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1076841.html.
[40] "Iraqi Christians forming militias," Middle East Times, 29 October 2008, http://www.metimes.com/Security/2008/10/29/iraqi_christians_forming_ad_hoc_militias/a37c/
[41] Frances Harrison, "Christians besieged in Iraq," 13 March 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7295145.stm.
[42] UNHCR, "Iraq: Displaced Christians return to Mosul", 11 November 2008. http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/SHIG-7LAGWG?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=irq

nearly $900,000 (1 billion Iraqi dinars) to help safeguard the rights and freedoms of Christians.[43] But Mosul's deteriorating security has made it a dangerous area for all minority groups. As UNHCR reports, "The general lack of law and order in Iraq's second largest city has been a serious concern not only for Christians but other minorities as well, including Shebeks, Yezidis and other minority groups who were forced to flee their homes in recent years."[44]

Religious minorities have all been harassed and persecuted. Baha'is have few rights as they are not recognized as citizens while Mandaeans face extinction if their displacement means that they are unable to find marriage partners within their communities. The massacre of 400 Yazidis in Nineveh province was one of the worst attacks against minorities.[45] Places of worship of all the minority religious communities have been attacked and destroyed.

Several of the minority groups also find themselves caught up in the power struggles between Kurds, Sunni, and Shi'a who are fighting over historical claims. In some cases, the minority groups have organized themselves. Recent demonstrations by Turkomans, for example, have protested the violence they have experienced at the hands of the Kurds. Some minority groups are campaigning for "what is variously described as a protected, semi-autonomous, or autonomous area for Christians, and some say for other minorities as well, in the Nineveh Plains area."[46]

Some minorities face the threat of assimilation because the areas they live in, such as Mosul and Kirkuk, put them at the center of power struggles between Kurds, Sunni and Shi'a fighting over historical claims and particularly oil resources. They also lack the protection of tribes which Sunnis and Shi'a enjoy. While the Kurds are providing much-needed security and emergency refugee housing, there are also reports that they are seeking to manipulate the Christians for political gain through a sophisticated system of patronage. [47] For example, there are reports that Christians cannot get jobs unless they join the Kurdish Democratic Party of KRG President Massoud Barzani. Kurdish officials in Erbil told Newsmax about the aid they were providing to Christian refugees who have come to the KRG fleeing persecution. But the message from some local Christian officials is different, that the funds are being used for political reasons.[48]

Minorities and the Future

Because of sectarian cleansing, most Iraqis today live in communities in which their sectarian group is in a majority. Shi'a have fled mixed communities for Shi'a communities. Sunnis have left mixed communities for Sunni ones. And minorities have either fled the country or have

[43] "Iraq pledges $900K to help displaced Christians" CNN, 2 November 2008. http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/11/02/iraq.christians .
[44] Ibid.
[45] Fred Attewill, "Iraq bombs death toll rises to 400", The Guardian, 16 August 2007. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/16/iraq.iraqtimeline. Note that other sources, such as IRIN, put the death toll at 215.
[46] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Iraq Report -2008*,16 November 2008, p. 16.
[47] Ken Timmerman, "Christians Face Extinction in Northern Iraq, Newsmax.com, 24 April 2008. http://www.newsmax.com/timmerman/christians_mosul_iraq/2008/04/24/90555.html.
[48] Timmerman, op cit. http://www.newsmax.com/timmerman/christians_mosul_iraq/2008/04/24/90555.html.

sought protection in areas they consider more secure, particularly the Northern provinces.[49] As attention turns to the prospects for return of refugees and IDPs, the main issues facing Iraq today are 1) whether or not sectarian cleansing can be reversed, and 2) what role there will be for minorities in Iraq's future political and demographic life. This debate is being carried out on two fronts.

At the national level, there have been long and bitter debates about the Law on Provincial Elections, which will regulate elections now scheduled for 31 January 2009. Initially delayed because of disputes over whether and how to include Kirkuk and the Kurdish-controlled governorates in the electoral process, the law was eventually passed with a provision to delay elections in those four governorates. However, minorities were particularly alarmed with provisions which removed the requirement for a specified number of seats being guaranteed to minorities. Following demonstrations in Iraq and around the world, the law was amended to provide for limited minority representation at the provincial level. However, this provision has not satisfied minorities who claim that their lack of political representation will result in a restriction of their rights.

According to the amended law, minorities will be guaranteed just six of the 440 seats on the provincial councils, half what the UN had proposed. Christians have one seat each on councils in Baghdad, Nineveh and Basra (instead of the three seats in Baghdad, three in Nineveh and one in Basra that had been recommended by the UN). Yazidis will be given one guaranteed seat in Nineveh, instead of the three proposed by the UN. The Sabeans will get one seat in Baghdad and the Shabaks will get one seat in Nineveh. Although minorities can run for other seats, in the past few years, Iraqis have voted along sectarian lines.[50]

There are internal divisions within the Christian political community, which have been brought to the fore with discussions about the provincial elections. Most notably the Assyrian Democratic Movement (the most powerful of the Assyrian Christian groups) has allied with central government groups in opposition to the dominant Kurdish bloc which is supported by the smaller Christian groups. The three parties that joined the Kurdish list support annexation, saying that they see more hope of self-rule in Christian majority areas within the Kurdish region. The Assyrian Democratic Movement on the other hand, opposes the annexation of the province to the Kurdish region, saying it fears Kurdish domination. However, despite their disunity, Christian parties are united in the aim of unifying the three Christian ethnicities: the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs into one Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac ethnicity. They perceive themselves as victims of the divisive Arabization policy. All Christian parties in Kirkuk also opposed an earlier draft provincial council law allocating 32% of seats to each of the Kurds, the Arabs, and the Turkomans, and only 4% for Christians in Kirkuk.[51]

[49] For a map of the displaced, see: http://www.uniraq.org/documents/Minority%20Religious%20Groups%20in%20Iraq%20(Mar%202008).pdf

[50] Katherine Zoepf and Sam Dagher, "Iraq Gives Religious Minorities Fewer Seats than the U.N. Suggested," New York Times, 9 November 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/09/world/middleeast/09iraq.html

[51] Diaa al-Khalidi, "Divisions split Kirkuk Christians, Niqash, 11 November 2008

The provincial elections have been heralded as a key step forward in the process of Iraqi national reconciliation, so this development is particularly distressful for those invested in broad participation at the polls. Unfortunately, the new formula for minority seats on the provincial councils has alienated some members of Iraq's minority communities, causing some to say they will boycott the January elections. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, in a report to the Security Council stated that the provincial elections "represent the most significant political event in the coming months in Iraq as they can advance political dialogue, establish representative provincial councils and empower community leaders to meet the needs of local citizens in cooperation with the government." However, he also noted the potential for election-related violence (as was seen in Mosul), and urged that the elections be conducted in "a secure environment and a transparent manner."[52]

The question of the future of minorities in Iraq is also played out in the debates over the return of refugees and IDPs. While estimates of the number of people who have returned are not clear and UNHCR and other international organizations are not promoting return at the present time, both refugees and IDPs have begun to go back. As is consistent with other displacement situations, most of those who are returning are IDPs. UNHCR reports that no one from the smaller minority groups has returned from neighboring countries.

Iraqi minority returns depend, first and foremost, on security. People will not return (at least not voluntarily) to areas where they perceive that their lives will be in danger. In this regard, the decision to reduce minority representation in provincial governments is not a confidence-building measure to encourage minorities to return. Moreover, there have been many cases where those returning to mixed areas have faced threats, harassment, and death by those of the dominant sect – often by those who were responsible for their displacement in the first place.[53]

Minority returns also depend on adequate measures to resolve property disputes. In the case of Iraq, this means that the government must establish measures to permit minorities to recover their lost property and to implement evictions of those occupying their homes. The Iraqi government has adopted policies requiring the eviction of those who have occupied the homes of the displaced and providing compensation both to returnees and to those evicted. However, initial reports are that the policies are being applied unevenly and it remains to be seen whether Iraqi returnees have sufficient confidence in the Iraqi police forces to implement evictions which are not only unpopular, but often dangerous.

It is not overstating the case to say that Iraq's future depends on how it deals with the question of minority returns – including both returns of Shi'a and Sunni to mixed communities and returns of the smaller minority groups. If religious minorities do not return, Iraq is likely to be not only a very different country than it was before 2003, but also a less tolerant and diverse country. While many of Iraq's religious minorities have sought protection in neighboring countries, there are still many who live within the country's borders. We have seen in other cases -- such as the

[52] The Associated Press, "UN warns of possible violence in Iraq elections", International Herald Tribune, 10 November 2008, http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/11/10/news/UN-UN-Iraq.php

[53] Corinne Reilly, "Iraqis are being attacked and killed for returning to their homes", McClatchy Washington Bureau, 13 October 2008. http://www.mcclatchydc.com/100/story/53871.html

emigration of Christians from the Middle East -- that when minorities leave, the situation for the minorities who remain becomes more difficult – triggering, in turn, more displacement. Thus, if the minorities in exile or displacement do not return to their communities, it is likely that there will be attempts by the minorities who remain to also leave their communities. Moreover, if they do not return, there will also be pressure on host governments to accept that these Iraqis will live in their countries for a long time.

Steffan de Mistura called on the Iraqi Government authorities to do everything in their power to safeguard the human rights and protection of Christian, Yezidis, Shabak and other minorities - all of whom have been the victims of terrible attacks - and to ensure that those responsible for these attacks are swiftly brought to justice. The Special Representative of the Secretary General also urged local authorities, as well as the Kurdistan Regional Government, to assist in protecting the rights of minorities and their religious identity, as well as in ending impunity for these criminal attacks. He said Mosul has historically been and must remain the cradle of religious and ethnic diversity, reiterating the United Nations' position that respecting and guaranteeing the rights of minorities in Iraq is "absolutely fundamental to a stable and democratic future for the country."[54]

If Shi'a and Sunnis are unable to return to their communities of origin because of perceived insecurity or discrimination, Iraq faces the possibility of being a de facto segregated state. Returning refugees unable to return to their communities will become in effect internally displaced persons, living with relatives or friends in areas where their communities are in the majority – further contributing to sectarian polarization.

Future Directions.

There are several lessons we've learned in the humanitarian field which might be useful here.

1. Prevent displacement. Once people leave their homes and communities, a difficult dynamic sets in which makes it difficult to easily go back to normal life. While those who are displaced are not always the most vulnerable group in a society – sometimes those who stay behind are more at risk – they do have specific needs: for shelter, for documentation, and for support in finding solutions. And the longer displacement lasts, the more difficult it is to find those solutions. Return becomes more difficult, particularly when property is occupied by others. When people are not able to return, problems with host communities – whether in the country of origin or the country of refuge – also become more difficult. Initial welcoming attitudes may be replaced with resentment and suspicion. The demands they place on public services may tax the infrastructure of the host communities. The presence of refugees almost always complicates relations between the governments of the country of origin and host country.

   In the case of Iraq, preventing displacement means ensuring that people feel safe in their communities and that they have access to public services and livelihoods. We know that

[54] Source: UN Assistance Mission in Iraq. "The SRSG shocked and outraged at the continuous killings targeting religious minorities", 12 November 2008. http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/SHIG-7LAGWG?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=irq

security is contextual; the number of civilian deaths may be going down on the national level, but certain groups – particularly minorities -- may still feel insecure.

In July 2297, Hunain Qaddo, chair of the Iraq Minorities Council "accepts that minorities always suffer during a civil conflict and doesn't advocate safe havens for minorities or calling on other countries to take in more refugees. More needs to be done to train the new Iraqi army, to put pressure on the Kurds to respect minority rights and back the creation of a dense force recruited from the minorities in the north.[55]

2. Do no harm. A mantra in the humanitarian world is that humanitarian actions should not make conditions worse. Unfortunately, there are many examples where well-meaning humanitarian action has created new resentments and tensions. In the case of Iraqi minorities, I would suggest that the United States government resist the temptation to prioritize the needs of Iraqi Christians and rather focus on actions to address the needs of all minorities and other vulnerable groups. Although Christians have been targeted, so have Yazidis and Mandaeans; few would argue that Palestinians living in Iraq are not at particular risk. When the US government and the United Nations take a principled stand to assist minorities, the potential for 'doing harm' is reduced. An appearance that the US is interested in helping Christians can influence perceptions of the United States as well as contribute to the widely-held impression that humanitarian action is being undertaken in pursuit of Western interests.

   Similarly the idea of creating a safe haven for threatened minorities may appear like a compassionate solution, but the long-term consequences of this need to be thought through carefully. Will such a safe haven be sustainable? Will it be safe?

3. Address property issues early. People who have been displaced want their property – their homes, land, and belongings – back. Issues around property restitution and compensation are never easy, but they are particularly complicated in Iraq given the layers of competing property claims made over the years. Fair and efficient mechanisms for resolving property claims are needed and enforcement of decisions should be carried out by impartial and legitimate bodies In the case of Iraq, this means ensuring that the Iraqi police are trained to handle property disputes and are ready to implement decisions made by a competent authority whether it be a court, quasi-judicial commission, or administrative body. It is the responsibility of national authorities to protect property which has been left behind by refugees and IDPs and returns will be facilitated if means can be developed now to register property which has been left behind.

4. Consult with the affected communities. When displaced people do not know what is going on and lines of communication lack transparency, rumors spread and suspicion builds. Consultation with refugees and IDPs about their needs during displacement and

[55] Patrick Jackson, "Crushing Iraq's human mosaic", BBC News. 13 July 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6293230.stm

about durable solutions is not only a way of upholding their rights and dignity, but is also essential in determining durable solutions to their plight. Over and over again, we have seen the positive results, for example, of organizing 'go and see' visits in which refugees and IDPs can see conditions in their area of origin before returning. Public service announcements and so called "know your rights" campaigns can also help individuals find solutions to their displacement and protect their fundamental rights and freedoms.

5. Don't forget about the host communities. Assistance programs usually target people who have been displaced as well as other vulnerable groups. But there is a danger when local residents perceive that the displaced are receiving preferential treatment. Programs which assist both the displaced or refugees and, for example, poor Syrians can go a long way in reducing this resentment.

6. Consider the long-term impact of displacement and possible solutions. The historical record is not very successful in efforts to reverse ethnic cleansing. The case of the Balkans illustrates that in spite of strong international commitment to support a reversal of ethnic cleansing and in spite of generous financial support, such a reversal is hard to achieve. Today in the Balkans, hundreds of thousands of people remain displaced thirteen years after the Dayton peace agreement was signed. Many do not want to go home because they do not feel safe in doing so.

   Resettlement of Iraqi minorities to the US and other countries should be stepped up. There are many individuals and communities whose lives will be at risk if they return and resettlement offers the best available alternative for protecting them. But resettlement does have a cost; for example, the communities left behind which may be even further depleted and made even more vulnerable. In terms of the US Resettlement Program, the 'material support' provision as grounds for rejecting cases should be abolished. This provision has been detrimental to many people around the world, but is particularly egregious for Iraqi minorities who may have no alternative to paying ransom for kidnapped relatives; doing so should not be a bar to admission to the US Resettlement Program.