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60 Minutes: Iraq's Christians in Peril

Washington: December 3, 2007 – CBS' 60 Minutes distinguished itself again in breaking the general silence on the perilous situation Iraq's ChaldoAssyrian Christians are facing; suffering from deliberate ethno-religious cleansing as US forces must watch.

Information on the exact situation is problematic, but the strongest figures indicate that upwards of 25 to 30 percent of Iraq's Christian ChaldoAssyrians have become refugees since the invasion and that an overwhelming proportion are internally-displaced persons (IDPs), mainly going to the Nineveh Plain, but also Dohuk and Arbil.

This is ethno-religious cleansing by any definition. A letter from an Islamist group operating in Baghdad was read, it stated, "To the Christian, we would like to inform you of the decision of the legal court of the Secret Islamic Army to notify you that this is the last and final threat. If you do not leave your home, your blood will be spilled [...] You and your family will be killed."

60 Minutes' focus on the targeting and almost successful cleansing in former Iraqi Christian urban population centers such as Dora draws attention to religious-based targeting – a major factor in the flight of ChaldoAssyrians from their ancestral homeland of over 6,700 years.

The US Government officially states that ChaldoAssyrians are victims of generalized violence. The 60 Minutes report reveals the direct persecution of this indigenous minority. ChaldoAssyrians are *particularly targeted* and are facing ethno-religious cleansing. The US Government must develop a policy to deal with this crisis.

Michael Youash, Project Director of the Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project, said, "The basics of any policy must see aid reaching Christian ChaldoAssyrians and other minorities equitably and especially for IDPs; the formation of a formal local police force in the Nineveh Plain and the removal of obstacles to the creation of the Nineveh Plain Administrative Unit allowed for by Art. 125 of Iraq's Constitution."

Staff from 60 Minutes first met with ISDP in Iraq regarding the situation of Iraq's Christian ChaldoAssyrians in early 2006. At that point, they were also working with the Chaldean Federation of America on the situation of refugees in the region. Meetings with ISDP and the Assyrian Aid Society followed in 2007. "60 Minutes must be recognized for bravely pursuing a story despite the security risk and the fact that no decision-maker in government really wants to deal with this crisis." said Youash.

The show, entitled, “Vicar: Dire Times for Iraq’s Christians”, aired on Sunday, December 2nd, 2007. Those interested can visit the website for the program:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/29/60minutes/main3553612.shtml>

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The Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project's (ISDP) research and policy analysis maintains that ChaldoAssyrians and Iraq's other, *real* minorities (e.g. Turkmens, Shabaks, Yezidis, Mandaeans and others) are the best variable for leveraging the development of a genuine and sustainable democracy over the long term.

For the United States, Iraq's *real* minorities are also the truest ‘*moderates*’ as defined by the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terror. As such, they are a key element in the fight against extremism in Iraq and the Middle East as a whole.

ISDP works to ensure that these minorities are factored into policy development accordingly through research and policy analysis for all relevant stakeholders.