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US Ambassador Ryan Crocker Affirms Significance of Art. 125 for Iraqi Minorities

Washington: February 19, 2008 – In late 2007 US Ambassador Ryan Crocker affirmed the significance of Art. 125 for Iraq’s developing system of federalism, when responding to questions from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about minorities and their goal for a federal unit in the Nineveh Plain.

Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, asked about the political viability and response of the Iraqi government to the Art. 125/Nineveh Plain solution for minorities. Sen. Biden prefaced his question to Amb. Crocker stating, “Some Iraqi parliamentarians have called for the creation of an autonomous region in the Nineveh Plains, home to a disproportionate number of Iraqi minorities, including Assyrians, Turkmen and Yazidis.”

Amb. Crocker’s response was clear-cut, writing that, “Some Iraqi parliamentarians and local politicians in Ninawa have called for an autonomous region in Ninawa province, citing Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution. Iraqi citizens can pursue the creation of a separate administrative region through processes consistent with this article.”

“Senator Joseph Biden’s committee is clearly investigating issues of federalism in Iraq that includes accounting for minorities, specifically Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriacs among others. Amb Ryan Crocker’s affirmation that politicians in Ninawa are trying to advance this agenda is a reflection of their success in profiling this goal”, said ISDP’s Project Director, Michael Youash.

The Iraqi Minorities Council, comprising an array of Iraq’s most vulnerable minorities, chaired by Dr. Hunain Al-Qaddo, is a strong voice for the creation of such a unit. The Assyrian Democratic Movement was the first to champion this idea, but now virtually all other Iraqi-based minority political groups are actively pursuing this agenda.

Through meetings, proposals, and constant communication with relevant government officials, ISDP is working with Iraqi partners promoting the Art. 125/Nineveh Plain solution. ISDP sees clearly that the goal of these minorities is a stronger more integrated Iraq, through federalism. The goal is true decentralization without partition, which the minority peoples overwhelmingly support.

“Some question the Art. 125 solution on the basis of misunderstandings of its significance in relation to Iraq’s developing federal system. Amb. Ryan Crocker’s

response puts any doubts to rest. ISDP is working to ensure that senior-most US decision-makers are being equipped to deal with matters most vital to the survival of minorities in their homeland; the establishment of the Nineveh Plain Administrative Unit in accordance with Art. 125 of the Iraqi Constitution is a central part of that mission”, said Youash.

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The Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project's (ISDP) research and policy analysis maintains that Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriacs 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.