

**Testimony by Bishop Francis Kalabat, Chaldean Catholic Eparchy  
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House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human  
Rights and International Organizations  
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I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you very much for having me here before you today. This hearing could not come at a more critical time as it elevates the “responsibility to protect” the most vulnerable ethno-religious populations in Iraq and Syria.

In this report, whenever I mention Christians, it will include Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syriac-based Christians who to this day still speak Aramaic - the language of Jesus - and uphold an ancient culture and identity. This, as we speak, is under the threat of extinction. Iraq and Syria’s Christians are part of the original inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia, the Cradle of Civilization who played a crucial role in the advancements of the sciences and philosophies of the region and even in the west.

Since the fall of Mosul in early June 2014, the Christians have endured targeted persecution in the form of forced displacement, sexual violence, and other human rights violations. All 45 churches and monasteries around Mosul fell to the hands of ISIS which subsequently removed the buildings’ crosses, burned, looted, and destroyed much of these properties. By late July, the last of the Christians in Mosul escaped the city following an edict issued by ISIS offering minorities the option to either convert to Islam, pay a tax, flee, or be killed leading to a modern day genocide. Before Iraq, ISIS had committed horrible genocidal atrocities against the Christians in Syria. Though I represent and I will speak about the Christians, ISIS has committed horrific atrocities against the Yezidis against other sects including Muslims themselves. But I am here to represent the Christians.

It is important to recognize that the atrocities faced by Christians in Iraq cannot be reduced to only the rise of ISIS. As early as 2005, Christians and other minorities in Iraq have experienced their own slow and perpetual genocide. I wish to note that the Obama administration including President Obama himself, have neglected to mention that the ISIS atrocities were committed against Christians. They rightly mention atrocities committed in Iraq against the Yezidis, and they are horrific. But there are also atrocities of rape, killings, crucifixions (for Christians), beheadings, hangings that the Syrian and Iraqi Christians have endured and they are intentionally omitted. This they do to their shame.

In my twenty years of ministry, whenever I ministered to a person that was a victim of a violent crime such as rape, burglary or physical violence, and the justice system could not adequately proclaim it a crime let alone bring justice, the victims feel violated again. There are more than 150,000 Iraqi Christians who are now displaced in northern Iraq or are refugees in other countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey who are being victimized by the Obama administration in not recognizing their suffering. There are countless Christian villages in Syria

who have been taken over by ISIS and have encountered genocide and the Obama administration refuses to recognize their plight. Again I say, shame on you.

Speaking of these refugees, I wish to take this opportunity to recognize Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. They have been overwhelmed by all the refugees, Muslim and Christian, and yet they never closed their borders to them. I especially wish to recognize Turkey who went out of their way to grant them free medical needs, free education, and countless other opportunities by an act of Parliament to all Iraqi refugees. But this also brings me to a very sensitive issue. Should these refugees be brought to the U.S. and if so should we differentiate between Muslim, Christian, or Yezidi refugees. In my mind it shouldn't be an issue because the other Middle Eastern countries should have stepped up.

Here's my point, where is the best place for a Muslim, Syrian refugee to settle? Kuwait or Germany? Saudi Arabia or Canada? Qatar or America? My point, it is much easier for an Arab refugee to start over in a country where the language is the same, the culture is similar and the official religion of that country is the same (barring between Suni, Shiite, etc.). Where is the best place for a Yezidi or Christian refugee? What ISIS was able to do is the Christian does not feel safe in his own country. The targeting of the Christian for rape, loss of property, killing, etc. has caused a loss of trust. Christians have not been part of any terrorist activity, but instead have been the targets of terrorist activities. And now, they are being looked at as possible terrorists. This is simply unfair on top of everything that they have gone through.

But shouldn't be the same for a Muslim anywhere else in the Middle East. But where is Kuwait? Where is Saudi Arabia? Where is Qatar? Where is Bahrain? Arabs pride themselves of what is called "Arab Hospitality" which includes the proper treatment of those who are needy. What happened to welcoming them as guests and sharing with them their needs? The Muslim faith asks of that as well. Where are they? I speak this to their shame as well.

Does this mean that no Muslim Syrian or Iraqi refugee should enter a western country? No. I don't, not at all. I am merely saying that it would be a much easier task and I believe many if given the opportunity would prefer to remain in a safe Middle Eastern country then to go to Sweden and feel lost. Do I say all? NO but today it's not even an option and again I say this to their shame who have lost their Arab dignity and Muslim faith. The reason is these refugees are seen as surplus, undignified, excess trash that they don't want in their country.

Let us now turn to possible solutions. First, the U.S. government should partner with a wide range of churches, charities, private corporations, foundations, and nongovernmental organizations to ensure the efficient delivery of aid and remove the barriers associated with it.

Second, the U.S. government should not turn a blind eye to the genocidal atrocities faced by Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities including the Christians, the Yezidis and others. A decision by the U.S. to recognize the genocide faced by these groups would send a powerful signal to the United Nations and every member of the international community to act on their plight.

Third, oversee the establishment of an autonomous region for Christians, Yazidis and other vulnerable minorities. This will stop the mass exodus of Iraq's ethno-religious minorities and

enable the refugees who have fled Iraq to return to their ancestral homeland with some certainty of safety. This repositioning of Iraqi Christians has resulted in demographic shifts that have virtually displaced the Christian community's core. The recognition of the Nineveh Province could enable the 2 million diaspora members to become proponents, supporters and investors to the region.

Short of a genuine solution, Christians and other ethno-religious minorities of Nineveh will become extinct. Thank you for your time.