

## Questioning the legitimacy and validity of a census in the today's Iraq, particularly in the north

"Census data has become completely integrated into the decision making process by all sectors of the economy, not just government"<sup>1</sup> Census is the *sine qua non* of monitoring and planning of development at all levels in all types of administration. It provides critical data on population, society, economy, governing and housing. Planning for health services and education, elderly, employment, transport, housing, eradication of poverty, determination of taxation, studying of migration, ethnic diversity and funding are important uses of census data.

The Iraqi state, which has suffered from misadministration since the beginning of the Iraq-Iran war in 1980, can neither perform an effectual census nor use the statistical outcomes of such a census due to continuous engagement in different types of wars. The last Iraqi census, each of which had been organized in every 7th year of a decade, was conducted in 1987, when the majority of male Iraqis were recruited into the army and sent to the battlefield. Education was almost upset, the economy was destroyed and the chauvinist policy of the regime was at its highest. Accordingly, the reliability of this census is widely and justifiably questioned.

Since the beginning of the fall of the Ba'athist regime in 2003, organization of a census in Iraq has been intensively discussed and has become the subject of controversy and a point of concern. While Kurdish authorities strongly demand the implementation of a census in October 2010, the Major Iraqi coalitions (the Law, al-Iraqiya and national coalition) in Baghdad are hesitant to perform a census at this time and the non-Kurdish communities in Iraq's northern provinces are assertively oppose realization of a census.

The organization and implementation of a serious operation like a census in a country where the political powers are rash on power- and land-sharing, the governmental administration is renewing on sectarian bases after having collapsed, serious demographical alterations have occurred, ethnic and religious sectarianism is raised and the unity of the state is threatened, should be carefully approached.

Insufficiency with respect to planning instruments and organs, the politicizing of census outcomes, legalization of vast confiscated lands, and validation of demographical changes are considered the major direct challenges to the establishment of a census in the today's Iraq.

### Insufficiency of instruments and organs

Failure to produce a census for more than 20 years has significantly limited the experience of the governmental organs and instruments which organize censuses. The alteration of almost the entire Iraqi governmental administration, which is based on sectarian policies, has lead to a reduction of qualified staff and offices. Furthermore, the politicizing of administration will likely open the door for a manipulation of outcomes. In this regard, extensive erroneous figures of the Iraqi population statistics which were published by the governmental and even by the United Nations authorities after 1990 will certainly reoccur in the present, much more deteriorated Iraqi political and administrative atmosphere. The following issues are some of the major erroneous statistics which were published in the last decades:

#### *Exaggeration of the Kurdish population figures and the unfair outcome*

The estimated population of Iraq in 1997 and 2003 was calculated under the supervision of the United Nations. The population of the three Kurdish provinces, which was given by Kurdish authorities, was 2,861,701 in 1997. This increased to 4,621,578 in 2003, whilst the increase in the rest of Iraq was from 18,431,372 in 1997 to 22,014,600 in 2003. This means that Kurdish authorities increased their figures by 61%, while it was 19% in the rest of Iraq. The inflation in the

Kurdish statistics should be about 1,609,262. Noting that no such significant population displacement toward the Kurdish provinces took place between 1997 and 2003. This figure puts the percentage of the Kurds in only the three Kurdish provinces at 17% of the total Iraqi population, whilst it is well known that this is the percentage of the Kurds in *all* Iraq. Since this statistics were used in conjunction with the 'oil for food Programme', the Kurdish region was given by the United Nations 17% of the Iraqi oil outcomes. The Kurdish authorities also increased hugely the population of the province of Duhok from 293,304 in 1987 to 916,140 in 2009.<sup>2,3</sup>

#### *Inconsistency in Kerkuk population figures*

The statistics of the Kirkuk population is another example of controversial figures. According to ration cards, which are given by the Ministry of Trade, the population of the Kerkuk province in 2006 was 1,098,061,<sup>4</sup> while according to Identity cards, which are given by the Kurdish-dominated Kerkuk population registration office, the Kerkuk population was 1,353,700 in April 2007.<sup>5</sup> Another controversy concerns the number of voters in the province of Kerkuk. Despite the fact that there are widely differing statistics published by the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq on the number of Kerkuk voters,<sup>6-10</sup> the number which was published during the later Iraqi general elections was 787,673.<sup>11</sup> The Voter's percentage to the population in Iraq according to UNICEF is 52%, which puts the number of population in Kerkuk to 1,514,755 toward the end of 2009.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Abnormal total population figures*

The Iraqi Ministry of Planning determined the total number of the Iraqi population (for the proposes of the Iraqi general elections of March 2010) to be 32.4 million, which translated roughly to 1 seat per 100,000 people.<sup>13</sup> The statistical figures of the Iraqi authorities are clearly incompatible with an analysis of the growth rate during the later three decades and the previously recorded Iraqi population statistics. Such an analysis clearly falsifies the 32.4 million total population number of Iraq which was presented by Ministry of Planning.

Using the population growth rate in Iraq for the last decades and the total population in 1977 and 1987 in the geometric method for computing population  $P_1 = P_0(1+gr)^n$ , the number of the total Iraqi population should be 28,700,073 and 29,069,390 respectively. Accordingly, the number of the total Iraqi population has been inflated by 3,5 million by the Iraqi ministry of planning.

#### *Exaggeration of the Iraqi voter number*

The UNICEF's percentage for voters to the total Iraqi population is 52%.<sup>12</sup> The number of voters was 17,346,265 in the Iraqi provincial elections of 31 January 2009; the total population, therefore, should be 33,358,201. In the Iraqi general elections of 7 March 2010 the number was 18,902,073 meaning the total population should subsequently be 36,350,140.<sup>2,11</sup>

### **Politicizing census outcomes**

The presence of ethnic and religious sectarianism and secessionist challenges in Iraq's fragile administrative and political system will certainly politicize the census statistics. This has been underlined by the Iraqi minister for planning, who said that the legislative council links the distribution of wealth and the ethnicity which controls a given region to the census outcomes.<sup>14</sup> Politicization occurs, therefore, because of pressure on the central organization of statistics, as well as interference with the content of census questionnaires and with the quality assurance and anti-fraud measures.

The so-called disputed areas, extending about a thousand kilometers from the north-west to south-east of middle Iraq and covering around 35,000 square kilometers is home to about 4 million people, remain the most exposed regions to manipulation during the census. This is due to the following two factors:

- They were claimed aggressively by the Kurdish authorities who seized the region and rule by Peshmerga militias and politicized security services
- The majority of population consists of vulnerable non-ruling communities (Minorities)

The statistical outcomes of the census related to governance, property, demography and funding are the major areas which are expected to be subject to manipulation.

- *Governance*: The number of voters determines the number of parliamentarians and local and the state's government.
- *Demography*: The population registers, the ration cards and the percentages of the different ethnic communities will be fixed.
- *Property*: The real estate belonging to the peoples of the region will be registered to their names.
- *Funding*: The financial share of a region given from the state's budget depends on the population of the region.

Manipulation, which certainly will occur in the north of Iraq, will increase the Kurdish dominance in local administration and increase Kurdish presence in parliament and government. Hundreds of thousands of Kurdish newcomers into the so-called disputed regions will be fixed in the population registers, legalizing the demographical changes which help the Kurdish authorities easily contain the region. Note that the land and population register offices of the Kerkuk region have been plundered and fire was set to the building by the Kurdish Peshmergas in 1991. By officially registering real estate, thousands of hectares of lands are being legitimized in the so-called disputed regions, particularly in the Kerkuk region, which has been confiscated by the Kurdish newcomers. Note that from about 40 thousand complaint cases which were presented to the Property Claim Commission in Kerkuk province, only 10% have been solved. Additionally, the surface area of the city (Building Area) has increased by 20 square kilometers since the occupation in 2003.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Unique Kerkuk issue*

Kerkuk province possesses a unique status in several Iraqi laws: Article 53 item C of the State Administration Law states that Kirkuk shall have no right to form region. Article 23 of the Provincial Election Law of 2009 postponed voting in Kerkuk province. It stipulates a temporary power-sharing agreement between the three main groups. The revision of the 2005 election law on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2009 states that a special committee should review the voter lists in Kerkuk province during one year, if it finds a difference of 5% or more in the voter number, then the elections in Kerkuk will be annulled. Consequently, inclusion of Kirkuk in the general population census is constitutionally and legally flawed.

#### **Regarding the Turkmen**

The Iraqi Turkmen have suffered unduly from the results of previous censuses. When the early Iraqi population estimations were performed by the British mandate in the 1920s, the size of Turkmen population was a major factor in favor of Turkey during discussions of Mosul Issue in Lozano Negotiations and League of Nations. The percentage of Turkmen was determined to be 2% of the total Iraqi population. Later, this statistic steadily decreased, despite the fact that there was no significant emigration of Turkmen. The lack of precision of the figure 2% will easily be understood by:

- Any specialist in the Iraqi case who studies the Iraqi population
- Studying the widely distribution of Turkmen cities in different provinces

Several factors are going to unconstructively influence the Turkmen statistics with in the census:

- Kurdish claim of almost all Turkmen regions where the Kurds started dominate the administration after occupation and control by Peshmerga militias and Kurdish security forces.
- Kurdish policy to suppress the Turkmen.<sup>16, 17</sup>
- Significant inflation of the Kurdish population and voter numbers
- Tens of Turkmen tribes in the provinces of Diyala, Salah al-Din and Mosul who were forced to change their nationality to Arabs are still consider themselves Arabs despite their home tongue being Turkmen.

- Kerkuk was written as the place of birth in passports which were issued for tens of thousands of non-Iraqi Kurds in the Iraqi embassies with the Kurdish origin ambassador.<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion:

In the seriously politicized atmosphere of Iraq, the inexperienced Iraqi Office for Statistics which has a long history of erroneous population statistics, will certainly expose the planned Iraq census to intensive manipulation. The demographical changes will be legalized, the huge confiscated lands will be officially recognized, and the Kurdish hegemony on the administration of so-called disputed regions will be endorsed, which will then facilitate Kurdish containing of the so-called disputed areas.

### Recommendation:

SOITM urges the Iraqi authorities and the United Nations Mission Assistance to Iraq to postpone the Iraqi census which might be organized in October of this year until the population statistics of the north of Iraq, particularly of the so-called disputed regions, are thoroughly revised. The UNAMI should directly be involved in all stages of the upcoming census in the north of Iraq.

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