

## **Statement on KRG expansion plans**

Recent media reports about the political situation in northern Iraq expose an escalating conflict between the KRG and the Iraqi government. Several Kurdish leaders have expressed themselves in the media, going as far as saying there will be a war between Arabs and Kurds if the government continues to assert its authority in areas bordering the Kurdish dominated region.

In their comments Kurdish leaders fail to reflect the true nature of the areas bordering the KRG. In many of these so called disputed areas there are very few Kurds to be found. In the Nineveh plain for example the percentage of Kurds is at best 5 percent. Still, Kurdish leaders insist these areas be annexed to the KRG. In fact, the stretch of land bordering the KRG is mostly dominated by Turkmens and minorities such as Yezidies, Assyrians, Shabaks and Kakais. Instead of acknowledging this fact Kurdish political groups have launched a fierce campaign to describe minorities like Yezidies and Shabaks as Kurds, while carrying out different programs in an attempt to Kurdify these minority populations. While oppressed in the past, Iraq's Kurdish political parties have grown to become themselves the new oppressors in Iraq - seen from the perspective of minorities.

The Kurdish Peshmerga forces were successful in the help against Saddam Hussein as part of the Iraqi liberation movement, but today we note with sadness the transformation of the Peshmerga into a militia which is used to enforce Kurdish expansion plans in non-Kurdish settlements against the will of the inhabitants of these areas. The Peshmerga is today used to instil fear in minority communities in order to ensure compliance with KRG expansion scheme. Any referendum on the future of so called disputed areas carried out under Peshmerga presence will not be free and fair.

From being a centre of stability the KRG has turned itself into the major source of instability in Iraq today. While most of Iraq is becoming increasingly secure for all Iraqis, including vulnerable non Muslim communities such as Assyrians and Yezidies, the expansion plans of the KRG threatens to destabilize Iraq, its neighbouring countries and severely affect the vulnerable minorities who live in the areas claimed by Kurdish groups.

The undersigned organizations call on the KRG to refrain from all acts of violence and withdraw its forces from all areas outside the KRG. We also call on Kurdish leaders to respect the rights of minorities, to stop interfering in their internal issues and to stop describing Yezidies and Shabaks as Kurds.

We hope the UN and the EU will hear the calls of Iraqi minorities for justice and respect of their rights in Iraq.

**April 4, 2009**

Assyria Council of Europe

Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation

Yezidi Human Rights Organization

Shabak Democratic Assembly