



# ASSYRIAN UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE



Member, Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization (UNPO)  
United Nations Forum on Minority Issues  
Dec. 13-15, 2010

**Ms. Jennifer Babaie, Chair**  
**Committee on International Organizations**

## **Guaranteeing the Rights of Minority Women** *Concrete Steps Aimed at Guaranteeing the Rights of Minority Women*

On behalf of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, I wish to propose the following concrete steps regarding the effective mitigation of post-conflict human trafficking of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP).

As an example, I offer to the forum the case of the Assyrians, an ethno-linguistic minority, caught in the cross-hairs of Iraq's sectarian violence. There are currently an estimated 500,000 Iraqi refugees living in Syria<sup>1</sup>, of which Assyrians constitute a significant percentage of the population, despite having been only 5% of the total pre-war Iraqi population.<sup>2</sup> The majority of these Assyrians have fled in the past year alone. Because Syria does not allow refugees to work, many families are impoverished. In addition to this, the number of female headed households are increasing, leaving very little options for these women to find legitimate routes to employment, forcing them to compromise on basic human right for another: rent over food, income over health, a child's labor over its primary education.<sup>3</sup> This situation has effectively reduced women's participation in public life while at the same time increasing their forced participation in the sex trade occurring between Syria and Iraq. Many women have now begun serving as recruiters for brothels and cross-border human trafficking.<sup>4</sup> It is a mark of the severity of the situation that we see women working against one another rather than for another.

Paragraph 28 of the Draft Recommendations rightly refers to bilateral and regional communication as a proper tool to combat human trafficking. However, this alone is not enough to truly mitigate the root causes of the victimization of minority refugee women within the human slave trade. If a country is producing refugees, and thus operating unstably, it would be inefficient for the government to rely on communication alone with its neighboring states to solve such a problem.

Rather, we call for a modification to explicitly address more concrete steps regarding refugee trafficking, encouraging states to work together to create bilateral or regional bodies whose sole purpose would be to combat the slave trade and protect the women caught within it. Such a creation would be called upon whenever a woman is detained by authorities, in order to ensure she is not further victimized by ill-prepared

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Dawn Chatty, Dr. Philip Marfleet, *Iraq's Refugees – Beyond 'Tolerance,'* Forced Migration Policy Briefing 4, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford Department of International Development, Univ. of Oxford, pg. 14,

<http://www.iraqsurveys.com/articles/iraqsrefugees.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, "Iraq Overview", updated April 2008,

<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5726>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Regional Response Plan for Iraqi Refugees*, 2011, pg. 10

<sup>4</sup> Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, *Prostitution and Trafficking of Women and Girls in Iraq*, (2010), cited in UNAMI Human Rights Office, *Human Rights Report: 1 July-31 December 2009* (2010).



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police forces and preventing her from forced repatriation.<sup>5</sup> It would also assist in collecting accurate data of the number of women trafficked, their origins, and current status. This body would serve to convey the state's commitment to and investment in minority women and establish a relationship of trust between women and the justice system. In addition, we ask that women be actively recruited to participate within these bodies, enhancing their self-reliance and giving them an opportunity to assist members of their own community.

Lastly, we ask that the recommendations address the use of vocational and other skills training as a concrete and effective measure directly linked to the mitigation of violence and exploitation of minority women. In my previous example, if Iraq wished to enhance its new democracy and ensure its legitimacy, it would need to work directly with Syria on the refugee situation and provide a more secure home for the displaced Assyrian and other minority communities to return to.

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<sup>5</sup> Multiple reports cite mishandling of sex abuse cases. For example, "Iraqi Refugees: Women's Rights and Security Critical to Concerns," Refugees International, July 2009, <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/iraqi-refugees-womens-rights-and-security-critical-returns>.