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Author of *The Crimson Field*
Hearing Date: Friday, June 30, 2006
House Committee on International Relations
Washington, D.C.



My name is Rosie Malek-Yonan. I am not a politician. I am not a member of any political group or organization. I am an author. I am a Christian. I am an Assyrian. I am an American citizen. I am here to tell you about a 15 year-old boy named Fadi Shamoon.

Fadi was happily riding the new bike his father had given him, when suddenly on that 5th day of October, 2004, he was yanked off his new bike and kidnapped by terrorist Islamist Kurds. His family went crazy wondering what had happened to little Fadi, until a neighbor found Fadi's body thrown out on the roadside like garbage. He was in pieces. His body was barbarically mutilated and burned, and he was beheaded in a most horrific manner.

As unthinkable and unimaginable as this crime was, it wasn't the first that the residents of the Assyrian district of Ba'asheeqa had seen. Just prior to this, the Assyrians had mourned another son, 14 year-old Julian Afram Yacoub when he was hit in the head with a concrete block and then burned. Killing innocent Christian children has become fashionable in Iraq, forcing many Christians to flee their homes and villages, money-less and helpless.

In my recently published historical epic novel, *The Crimson Field*, I have relayed the factual atrocities that were unleashed on my people in the span of four years from 1914 to 1918, which wiped out two-thirds of my Assyrian population totaling some 750,000.

I have lost great grand parents, great uncles, great aunts, and many others. My people were victimized at the hands of the Islamist Kurds and Turks 91 years ago for being Christian. My people are still being victimized at the hands of the Islamist Kurds today for being Christian.

My churches are being bombed. My elders are being killed. My young brothers are being assaulted and kidnapped. My fellow students are being harassed and beaten. My children and neighbors are being beheaded. If my sister refuses to wear a Muslim *hijab*, she is raped or tortured by having acid thrown in her face. And yes, the majority of these incidents have gone unreported in the western media. These atrocities are occurring right under the watchful eyes of my American government since the "liberation" of Iraq.

March 16, 1918: “One hundred fifty souls perished that black day [at the hands of the Kurds]. One hundred fifty souls that were accounted for. One hundred fifty souls that were loved by fathers and mothers. By sons and daughters. By sisters and brothers. By wives and lovers. One hundred fifty souls, each one of them with individual names, who were expected at dinner tables that evening. That night and every night, one hundred fifty chairs would remain unoccupied, each leaving an empty space in the hearts of a nation on the brink of total extinction. One hundred fifty candles flickered in the distance when angels swept the earth for their souls.”

That was an excerpt from my book, *The Crimson Field*. I could have very well been writing about the plight of today's Assyrians in Iraq. History is repeating itself and no one is taking notice; No one except my people.

We Assyrians are a nation without boundaries. For thousands of years we have survived by sheer will power. Nearly a century ago, in the shadows of WWI, my grandparents struggled to survive to save future generations of Assyrians from extinction. Now that burden is mine to carry. Now my generation faces that same struggle to save my nation from total extinction in Iraq. We care about the preservation of the bald Eagle and strive to save it from extinction. We pass laws forbidding the hunting of a bald Eagle. Yet we allow the oldest nation in the world to become extinct. This is unforgivable.

Assyrians, like myself, living in diaspora in our adopted countries, are doing what we can to bring awareness to the plight of our people. We're not soldiers. We can't take up arms and fight in the streets of Baghdad. But we write books and articles, hold lectures, and make documentary films. We hold vigils and debates. We march. We go on hunger strikes and peaceful demonstrations. We hold rallies. We speak.

When you gain knowledge of atrocities occurring, you are in essence baring witness to those facts and as such, you inherit the absolute responsibility to testify to and alleviate those human miseries.

We Assyrians are not extraordinary people. But we are caught up in the crossfire of extraordinary events. And yet we don't fight violence with violence. We don't retaliate. Because we just want to live. When our churches are bombed, we don't think of retribution. We walk away as Christians should.

Just this week, 7,000 Assyrians left Baghdad for Northern Iraq. The women and children have taken refuge in other Assyrian homes, while the men sleep in the cemeteries at night. I don't mean figuratively. I mean literally. They sleep in the cemeteries because they have no other shelter. These suffering Assyrians in Iraq depend on our courage in the western world to help them.

A few months ago, I met with Mar Gewargis Sliwa, the Assyrian Archbishop of Iraq from the

Assyrian Catholic Church of the East. His account of the lives of Assyrian children in Iraq was appalling and heartbreaking. He said to me, “We can’t help our children anymore. They play in fields of blood. We are a poor nation. We need help. Help us.”

Just days ago I spoke with His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, the Patriarch of the Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, who told me that the priests in Iraq can no longer wear their clerical robes in public. They have to dress as civilians otherwise they are targeted and attacked by Islamists.

Today’s Iraq was once part of Assyria. Assyria was the first nation to accept Christianity. The Assyrian Church was founded in 33 A.D. Today, my Assyrian nation’s future is in serious trouble. Iraq’s Assyrian population of 1.4 million before the Iraq war has now dwindled down to nearly 800,000 with no one protecting their interests.



Though Assyrians are the indigenous people of Iraq, they are now either being victimized and killed, or being driven out of their homeland. Their practice of the Christian religion is not being tolerated or allowed by the terrorists and Islamist Kurds. Acts of violence and aggression towards the Assyrian Christians of Iraq are frequent occurrences. For example, Assyrian churches are prime targets of anti-Assyrian/anti-Christian campaigns, killing and injuring many Assyrians. From 2004 to June 2006, 27 churches were attacked or bombed for the sole reason that they were houses of worship of Assyrian Christians. On one occasion, 6 churches were simultaneously bombed in Baghdad and Kirkuk, and on another occasion an additional 6 churches were simultaneously bombed in Baghdad and Mosul. Simultaneous church bombings are a recurring pattern.

Despite the push for Iraq to become a democratic country, the unthinkable brutality of Saddam Hussein has now shifted and is being unleashed onto the Assyrians by Islamic fundamentalists and the Kurdish power that is rapidly rising in Iraq since the new so-called “democratic” Iraq emerged. I say “so-called” because it is not democracy when election fraud and intimidation runs rampant.

For the first time in Iraq's history, Assyrians were able to take part in the January 2005 elections. But thousands of Assyrians of the Nineveh Plain did not get a chance to vote. In the Assyrian towns and villages, ballot boxes did not arrive and Kurdish officials in charge of the voting process never showed up. There are numerous accounts of ballot box thefts. Where Assyrians could vote, the armed Kurdish militia and secret police made their presence known near the polling stations, intimidating the already frightened women and elderly Assyrians. And in Assyrian provinces, Kurdish votes were generated in abundance in place of Assyrian votes.

Today in war-torn Iraq, being denied their most basic human rights, these ancient and indigenous people continue to be the target of systematic oppression, murder, intimidation, kidnapping, and violence. Assyrians in Northern Iraq are marginalized by Kurds who have gained momentum and are exercising the same brand of violence they once complained of during Saddam's dictatorship.

Since the start of the Iraq war, various Eastern media outlets have steadily reported some, but not all of the violent crimes perpetrated against Assyrians. I have a mere sampling of these crimes attached to my Statement, which you have before you. However, most of these crimes go undocumented and unreported in the Western media. The fact that such cases are falling through the cracks does not in any way diminish their validity and legitimacy. Reported or not, when basic human rights are violated, crimes against humanity have been committed.

Other examples of Assyrians being marginalized can be found in the newly drafted Iraqi Constitution's Preamble. The Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomans are specifically mentioned, whereas Assyrians are omitted. Additionally, the Preamble cites atrocities against the Kurds but completely ignores those against the Assyrians during Saddam's regime as well as the 1933 Assyrian Massacre in Semele, Iraq.

Iraq's “liberation” has become the “oppression” of Assyrians. The war in Iraq is silently taking its toll on the Assyrians particularly in the Northern regions of Kirkuk, Mosul as well as Baghdad where the Assyrian population is concentrated. In the Nineveh Plains and its surrounding regions, under the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and through a dictatorship, Assyrian lands are being illegally confiscated.

And yet the Assyrians don't strike back. We remain peaceful and tolerant under intolerable conditions.

There is no aid or funding going to the Assyrian regions under our American watch. Basic medical need is non-existent for these Christians. A woman cannot have a c-section in her neighborhood. She has to drive miles away and risk her life and the life of her unborn child to

receive medical care.

We, Assyrians, are not asking for anything beyond the aid that is already going to Iraq for redevelopment. But we are asking that Assyrians proportionally receive aid sent to the Assyrian regions.

In Northern Iraq, millions of dollars in funding by the United States are assigned to be overlooked by Kurdish political parties who are primarily using these monies for their own advantage instead of a fair and equitable distribution of much needed funds to the Assyrian leadership to be used to aid Assyrian communities that are in dire need.

Today Assyrians are one of the most vulnerable minorities in the world. Under our watch, the largest Assyrian exodus is underway. It is estimated that if things continue to proceed as they now are, within 10 years, the Assyrian population of Iraq will be eradicated because of the ethnic cleansing, the forced exodus, and migration.



The indigenous people of the United States, the American Indians, have their human rights secured in their homeland in America. The indigenous people of Iraq, the Assyrian Christians, are being driven out of their homeland.

The displacement of Assyrians has become a seriously overlooked issue. During the Gulf War thousands fled to Jordan. In 2003, during the early stages of the Iraq War, gripped by fear, 40,000 to 50,000 Assyrians fled to Syria. Since then, thousands have been leaving Iraq because of the threats they have received. Homeless and living on the streets of Syria and Jordan, Assyrians helplessly await assistance.

According to Statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in October 2005 about 700,000 Iraqis fled to Syria. Between October 2003 and March 2005, 36% of these refugees were Christian Iraqi. That's 252,000 Assyrian Christian refugees.

When the Iraq war started, Assyrians did not have a “safe region” to go to within Iraq so naturally they ran to neighboring countries like Syria and Jordan. But since Assyrians are not displaced internally in Iraq, they no longer qualify for the current “displacement” assistance program. These Assyrian refugees who once led productive lives in Iraq, have resorted to begging, slavery, prostitution, and selling organs just to survive and feed their families. This is happening under our watch in America. The flip side of this is that millions of displaced Kurds are returning with assistance to settle back into their own regions because they, unlike the Assyrians, had a “safe region” to run to within Iraq. We must balance this.

It is an undisputable fact that Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilization and that the Assyrian Christians are the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, present day Iraq. It is also undisputable that Assyrians are a part of the fabric of today's Iraq, enduring under the constraint of Shariia or Islamic law though an in-name-only democratic Iraq.

Article (2)b of the Iraqi Constitution states: “No law can be passed that contradicts the principles of democracy.” Article (2)a of the Iraqi Constitution states: “No law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam.” These two articles are in contradiction with each other.

One of the rules of Islam, which can be found in the Koran at Chapter 3, line 19, states: “The only true faith in God's sight is Islam.” In Chapter 3, line 86, the Koran states: “He that chooses a religion over Islam, it will not be accepted from him and in the world to come he will be one of the lost.” Christians having chosen a religion over Islam are considered infidels and idolaters. In Chapter 2, lines 190 to 193, the Koran dictates to all Muslims to “Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is worse than carnage.” And so, Christian Churches are bombed and Christians are slain; Assyrian Christians.

Despite being the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, Assyrians are discriminated against and treated as unwanted guests in their own homeland as they face the threat of yet another modern-day ethnic cleansing by the Islamist Kurds that is reminiscent of the ethnic cleansing of nearly a century ago exercised by the then Ottoman Turks and Kurds.

Today's Middle-East must become ethnically balanced. Just like there is a Jewish state, and an Arab state, there is a need for a Christian state.

Although Chapter 4, Article 121 of the Iraqi Constitution entitled “Local Administrations” guarantees the administrative, political, cultural, educational rights for the various ethnicities such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and the other components, this law exists in theory only, and not in practice.

With the Iraqi government's suppression of the rights of Christians, Assyrians are looking to international communities and the western world in particular to the U.S. and U.N. to intervene on their behalf, enabling them to establish their own Assyrian Administrative Region in the Nineveh Plain in order to become, once again, a thriving and healthy community in Iraq. This Assyrian Administrative Region will witness the return of the Assyrian refugees to their

ancestral homeland. However, this measure must be taken now. This is not an issue that can be placed on the back burner.

The endangered Assyrian civilization that managed to survive under Genghis Khan, WWI and WWII, is now spiraling out of control towards complete obliteration due to the present ethnic cleansing, assimilation and forced migration and refugee exodus.

On 9/11 America experienced a reasonably small example of Islamic terrorism as compare to that with which Christians of the Middle–East are familiar. The world watched in horror as we, the citizens of this great nation, mourned our loss. And the world mourned with us. How shameful it would have been if the tragedy of 9/11 had gone unnoticed. How shameful it is that the tragedy of the Assyrian genocide of last century went unnoticed. How shameful it is that the current Assyrian massacres are going unnoticed.



WASHINGTON, D.C.
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL
OPERATIONS HOLDS A HEARING ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

30 JUNE 2006

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WITNESSES:

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