

Iraqi Parliament Removes Article 50 from the Provincial Elections Law, Marginalizes Assyrians

By Fred Aprim

On September 24, 2008, the Iraqi Parliament passed the Iraqi Provincial Elections Law of councils for governorates, districts and sub districts after 4 months of discussions and after 6 months of preparations. The Provincial elections are anticipated to take place no later than January 31, 2009. There will be no elections in Kirkuk (as per the agreement between the various groups) and in the three Kurdish dominated governorates of Arbil, Sulaimaniya and Dohuk. However, the large coalitions in Iraqi Parliament voted as well to eliminate article 50 from the Provincial Elections Law. This article guaranteed the indigenous Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people quotas (at least 13 seats as such: Baghdad 3 seats, Nineveh 3 seats, Arbil 2 seats, Kirkuk 2 seats, Dohuk 2 seats and Basra 1 seat) in the 6 governorates that these indigenous people live in with considerable numbers. This was approved on July 22, 2008. The Provincial Elections Law passed the Iraqi house of representatives (Iraqi Parliament) on July 22, however, the Kurdish coalition rejected it (because of Kirkuk issue mainly) and the Iraqi Presidential Council that includes Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and his two deputies, did not approve it; therefore, the law was referred back to parliament for further debate and modification. Other objections by the Presidential Committee were: Not satisfying the 25% women quota guaranteed by the Iraqi Constitution and making sure that mosques and shrines were not used for election purposes. The Kurdish coalition played a negative role in this new episode (removing article 50) as usual. The Legal Committee gave the reason (excuse) for removing Article 50 as being the absence of accurate statistics and criteria or database about the (Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people). This excuse is baseless because no group in Iraq has its real statistics and population known since there has been no fair census in Iraq. In fact, Mr. Younadam Kanna (ADM) did submit a study about the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian people during the discussions. The other problem was the two seats assigned for the Shabaks and Yezidis. The Islamic groups are against the Yezidis for having a seat, because Islam does not recognize the Yezidi religion. The Kurds were against this Yezidi seat as well, because they claim that Yezidis are ethnically Kurds (many Yezidis disagree of course), therefore, the Kurds say that the Yezidis do not need a separate seat. Furthermore, the Kurds protested about the one seat assigned for the Shabaks in Nineveh. They claimed that the Shabaks are ethnically Kurds as well (Shabaks disagree of course). However, the Arab Shi'aa groups rejected the Kurdish claims and reasoning and said that the Shabaks are Shi'aa; therefore, they deserve a separate seat. A big disagreement followed between the Kurds and Shi'aa groups and the lesser and smaller groups suffered at the end. Some try to divert the international public attention from the real reason by stating that article 50 was removed because the various Christian groups did not agree on who would occupy those seats. However, that is far from the truth.

Members of Iraqi Parliament Younadam Kanna and Abd al-Ahad Afram Sawa protested against the action on the floor during the vote. Meanwhile, U.N. rep. in Iraq Mr. Staffan de Mistura met with Head of Parliament Mahmood Al-Mashhadani and criticized the law and later demanded restoration of the article. Later, many Iraqi groups issued declarations rejecting the law and condemning the removal of article 50. Many Chaldean Syriac Assyrian groups began demonstrating against this action.