



## Chaldean Australian Society Inc.

23<sup>rd</sup> October 2014

### **Paper presented to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection At Meeting with Mr Daniel Boyer, Assistant Secretary, Humanitarian Branch**

The Chaldeans are Iraqi people and form the major part of Iraqi Christians. The Chaldeans are the indigenous people of Iraq who speak the Chaldean language, a form of Aramaic, in addition to Arabic, the official language in Iraq. Chaldeans are Eastern Rite Catholic, led by the Patriarch of Babylon and affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. In the last ten years after the 2003 events the Chaldeans as all Christians suffered and they are still suffering from persecution in their home country Iraq because of their Christianity. A number of Chaldeans were accepted as refugees in Australia and most of them reside in Sydney and Melbourne. As Australians, Iraqis, and Chaldeans we appreciate this and we are very grateful to Australian government for resettling in Australia Iraqi refugees over the previous years.

The situation in Iraq is still critical and still there is persecution against the Christians (Chaldean, Assyrian, Syriac, and others). Terrorist organisations (groups and members) in Iraq are targeting, threatening, torturing, and even killing Christians and consequently many Christians fled Iraq for their safety to seek asylum in countries like Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

Recently the Islamic State, a jihadist militant group, has occupied Mosul city and Christian towns and villages in Nineveh plain, Nineveh province, in north of Iraq. ISIL has occupied Tikrit, Batnaya, Tikrit, Qaraqosh, Bartella, Karmless, and other Christian habitations. Christians were forced to flee from Mosul city and Nineveh plain to the Kurdistan region or to the neighbouring countries to Iraq. The Christian community in Mosul and Nineveh plain is almost as old as Christianity itself. For the first time in the history of Iraq, Mosul and Nineveh plain are now empty of Christians.

The Christians lost everything. They lost their towns and villages. They lost their lands, possessions, jobs, money and a number of them lost family's members, relatives, or friends. They lost everything for just being Christian.

It is estimated that about 120,000 Christians fled Mosul city and Nineveh plain. A large number of them are still in critical conditions in camps, public places, schools, churches, parks, and under construction buildings in Duhok and Erbil provinces in Kurdistan region. Some of them were able to manage to flee Iraq to the neighbouring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan and also they are in bad conditions. It is expected increasing in numbers fleeing Iraq and seeking asylum in the neighbouring countries.

The hope to return to their villages and towns diminishes with time. Their towns and villages are still occupied by ISIL. They lost trust in their neighbours from Arab Sunni towns and villages who have joined ISIL and looted (with ISIL) their houses and possessions. The action of the international community until now has made no difference to them adding to that the international leaders are talking that it takes years to degrade or destroy ISIL.

Attached with this paper a statement by the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Iraq (Patriarch of Babylon), His Beatitude Louis Raphael Sako, on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2014, addressing “the conscience of the world” about Iraqi Christians’ crisis. [To read this statement click here](#)

These displaced Christians are genuine refugees and in need for all types of support from the international community including the Australian community. The humanitarian aid and resettlement are required to help them.

**The Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program should consider widely Iraqi Christians as:**

- They are genuine refugees
- The degree of persecution and discrimination they face is very high (they lost everything)
- They are really good people with good character. Most of them are well educated
- They have links to Australia through their families, relatives, friends and communities (particularly Chaldean and Assyrian communities) who are willing to support them

Our society (Chaldean Australian Society) serves and supports Chaldean people in Sydney and there are many concerns from our Chaldean members to the situation of their families, relatives and friends in Iraq and in the neighbouring countries. We hope the Australian government will continue providing resettlement in Australia to Iraqi Christian asylum seekers in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Syria including those who are recently displaced from Mosul city and Nineveh Plain.

Department of Immigration and Border Protection has announced that “in 2014-15 the government has committed a minimum of 2,200 places for Iraqis, including ethnic and religious minorities fleeing the violence in northern Iraq to neighbouring countries”. This is very good news reflecting the compassion and generosity of the Australian government and the Australians to the humanitarian disasters.

This announcement which came in August 2014 in the wake of Christians and other minorities’ crisis in Mosul city and northern Iraq, it is clear that the intention of the Australian government is to include those displaced people who fled their home country Iraq escaping from ISIL.

Taking into account the current long processing times for granting humanitarian visas either under SHP or refugee program (referred to Australia for resettlement by UNHCR) we think no one from recently displaced Iraqi Christians and other minorities can get one of these 2,200 visas. Thankfully, these 2,200 places are very helpful predominantly to the thousands of Iraqi asylum seekers (including Chaldeans, Christians, etc.) in neighbouring countries who are waiting (for long times or years) for processing their application to Australia under an orderly process.

But as the intention of Australian government is to help those people of ethnic and religious minorities who recently fled ISIL violence in northern Iraq, so **we suggest the Australian government to allocate at least 3,000 places to Iraqi Christians and other minorities in 2015-16 Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program and another 3,000 places to Iraqi Christians and other minorities in 2016-17 Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program** and taking into consideration increasing these numbers if the size of the offshore humanitarian program is increased. This is to include those who have already fled Iraq escaping from ISIL evil.

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