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Statement by KRG Office of the Coordinator for International Advocacy (OCIA)

U.S. Department of State Report Commends KRG Efforts to Consolidate Values Related to Religious Pluralism and Coexistence in the Kurdistan Region.

On June 10, 2020, the U.S. Department of State released its latest annual report on the status of religious freedom in Iraq entitled “2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iraq”. The Department of State annually submits this report to the U.S. Congress, as a part of their obligation on the basis of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

The abovementioned report relies on draft reports from U.S. embassies across the world. On their part, according to the preface of the report, the embassies focus on official sources, media outlets, human rights activists, academic centers, and religious establishments to draft their reports; after which the Office of International Religious Freedom in Washington review the assessments and draw their conclusive remarks with the assistance of local and international NGOs, community leaders, relevant U.S. governmental institutions, human rights monitors, scholars, and journalists.

KRG endeavors to protect and promote the values that are related to peaceful coexistence and communal integration. In this respect, each community residing in the Kurdistan Region has their legal, political, cultural, and economic rights preserved by law. Furthermore, KRG consistently observes the conditions of religious minorities in the disputed areas, including Shingal, Kerkuk, and Xanaqin, and strives to actualize coexistence and prosperity in these areas for Yezidis, Christians and the other groups.

The report commends KRG efforts to consolidate values related to religious pluralism and coexistence in the Kurdistan Region. It presumptively establishes a comparative analysis, in which the KRG receives substantial recognition in respect of providing accommodation, education, legislations, communal integration, political representation, facilitation of ritual ceremonies, security, financial support and much more.

Nevertheless, it has been clarified that the Christians and Yezidis crossing Peshmerga checkpoints in Mosul are provided with the necessary facilitations. Moreover, additional units of security forces have been deployed to facilitate their crossing and provide security. Currently, the Christian and Yezidi populations are allowed to visit their agrarian lands for pesticide. As with regard to the alleged discrimination towards Yezidis, KRG invariably provided the necessary legal documentations subsequent to their displacement due to terrorism. As opposed to what has been reported, the Yezidis have never been forced to identify themselves as Kurds or to support the KRG.

Finally, pilgrimage expenses are determined by the Iraqi High Commission on Pilgrimage Affairs. Iraqi Hajis usually stay up to 35 days in Saudi Arabia, and their accommodations and food are part of the initial payment (\$4200 by air). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and airline companies levied huge customs in this regard.

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