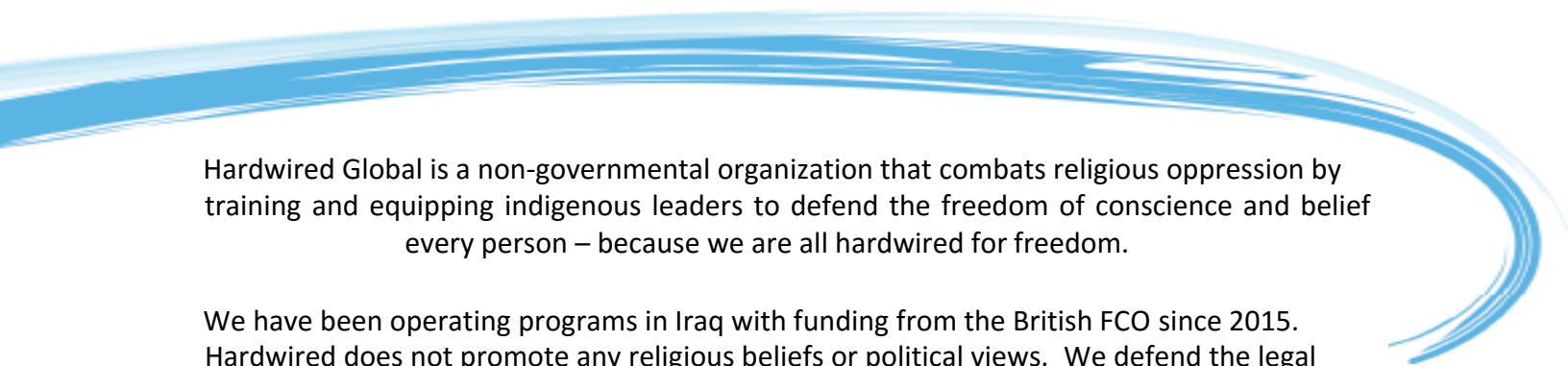


A Way Forward:

Prioritizing freedom of religion or belief in U.S. policy to end recurrent religion-related conflict in Iraq

Hardwired
Lena Smith and Tina Ramirez
September 2017



Hardwired Global is a non-governmental organization that combats religious oppression by training and equipping indigenous leaders to defend the freedom of conscience and belief every person – because we are all hardwired for freedom.

We have been operating programs in Iraq with funding from the British FCO since 2015. Hardwired does not promote any religious beliefs or political views. We defend the legal principal of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for every person without distinction.



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Children playing in Iraqi refugee camp for persecuted religious minorities. Photo: Jeff Gardner

Executive Summary

Since the rise of ISIS in 2014, the people of Iraq have faced unparalleled violence, mass displacement, and political and economic instability. As Iraqi and coalition forces continue the fight against ISIS, the United States and international community are considering strategies to stabilize the country. But outcomes of these strategies to secure affected communities will be unsuccessful if the underlying causes of conflict are not identified and addressed.

The egregious violence Iraqis have endured at the hands of ISIS is an extreme iteration of recurrent religion-related conflict in the region. By working with the government and civil society to address the root causes of conflict, the United States can resolve the pattern of recurrent U.S. and international intervention in the region. This requires support for policies and initiatives that promote freedom of religion or belief — in law and more broadly across society — thereby deconstructing the intolerant and prejudiced views and practices that reinforce religion-related and sectarian conflict.

Protecting the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief is essential to the future of all Iraqis — regardless of faith or creed — and is the linchpin to the nation's security, as well as its viability as a diverse, stable and democratic society.

Religion-Related Conflict in Iraq

The role of religion in Iraq's history and daily life is integral to understanding recurrent religion-related conflict in the country. Historically, Iraq — the Cradle of Civilization — has been home to the world's oldest and most diverse religious communities, including Jews, Christians, Yezidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Kakai, and Zoroastrians, as well as both Sunni and Shia Muslims. Since the mid-20th century, religious communities have faced discrimination by the government, which in turn legitimized social hostilities against these communities and fostered a culture of impunity. Jews were formally expelled en masse in 1950 through a combination of mob violence and government restrictions. Discriminatory laws against religious minorities were the norm under Saddam Hussein, including mandates which openly persecuted Baha'is. Sunni-Shia tensions in Iraq boiled over in the post-Saddam period. Sunni opposition groups found footholds in the shadow of the new Shia-dominated government, and Sunni movements seeking to regain control of Iraq rose to power in the form of extremist groups.

The rise of ISIS, a movement borne out of Al Qaeda in Iraq, is perhaps the most abhorrent manifestation of religious intolerance in recent history. Religious communities — including Yezidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims — were disproportionately targeted in the terrorist organization's genocidal campaign to kill, enslave, convert or expel those who failed to uphold their extremist ideology, and Sunnis also faced significant persecution. As many as 3.4 million were displaced from their homes.ⁱ Civilians trapped in ISIS-controlled territories were subjected to ongoing physical and psychological abuse.

In this religiously-charged atmosphere, Iraq's historical diversity remains under significant threat. Religious minority populations have plummeted as targeted communities have fled ongoing violence. There are perhaps 250,000 Christians left in Iraq, down from over one million before 2002.ⁱⁱ Sabean-Mandaeans have been targeted by ongoing violence in the region, and their numbers have fallen to a few thousand in the country.ⁱⁱⁱ The Yezidi community remains fragmented and scattered across Northern Iraq following ISIS's attack in 2014, which Yezidis recognize as the 74th genocide against their ancient community. The sectarian divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims continues to fuel ongoing conflict between the groups.

Historical Shortfalls of U.S. Policy in Iraq

Despite a 14-year presence in Iraq, U.S.-backed policies and initiatives to promote peace, security and stability in the region have fallen short. The “military-first” approach of previous administrations to the conflict failed to address the complex tensions and historical grievances that fuel religion-related conflict in the region.

The Bush Administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq employed the full force of the U.S. military in the “war on terror.” The Administration's policy prioritized deposing a dictator and defeating an armed insurgency, but failed to recognize the underlying causes of extremism, sectarian conflict, and religion-related conflict more broadly. Iraqi civilians endured brutal sectarian violence and attacks. Extremist ideologies, propagated by Al Qaeda, continued to flourish among impressionable and disgruntled Iraqis. Despite the ratification of a new constitution in 2005, historically vulnerable religious and ethnic minority communities remained largely marginalized and discriminated against by the State. Consequently, the underlying misconceptions and societal biases that encourage extremist and oppressive attitudes towards minority groups in Iraq continued to negatively affect these vulnerable communities.

The Obama Administration's approach to Iraq remained consistent with their broader and aptly described “whack-a-mole” approach to counterterrorism around the world. President Obama's policy in Iraq was consistent with his predecessor's “military-first” approach, but an underdeveloped counterterrorism

strategy resulted in reactionary policies and initiatives that were ultimately ineffective. Consequently, tensions and grievances among sectarian groups continued to grow, and religious and ethnic minority groups were further marginalized in society. Following the rise of ISIS in 2014, the Administration attempted to downplay the threat of the terrorist group and were slow to publicly acknowledge the devastating impact of the group's influence on the region. The Administration did not publicly recognize that ISIS committed genocide against Yezidis, Christians and Shia Muslims until March 2016 — nearly two years after ISIS began their campaign of terror across the region.^{iv} The statement came after months of considerable pressure from the United States Congress and numerous organizations on the Obama Administration to condemn ISIS's actions as genocide. Following the Administration's recognition of genocide, NGOs and civil society groups advocating for victim communities anticipated subsequent U.S.-led initiatives would support a robust post-genocide response in the region. However, victim communities and those advocating for their support were met with the Administration's conspicuous silence.

President Trump met with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in March 2017, and the two leaders agreed to promote a “broad-based political and economic partnership” in U.S.-Iraq relations.^v While defeating ISIS is a clear military objective for the Trump Administration, its strategy to develop a robust political and economic partnership with Iraq remains unclear. As the Trump Administration sets its agenda for Iraq, it is integral their approach addresses the root causes of conflict — which are also some of the greatest barriers to political and economic stability — in the region.

Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Future of Iraq

The security and stability of Iraq depends on a long-term commitment to programs and policies that help re-define the historical attitudes of intolerance and inequality that have provoked decades of recurrent religion-related conflict in the region. Decades of government discrimination and social hostilities have fostered an environment in which extremist ideologies and intolerance can foment. Long-term development of a society resilient to extremism and intolerance requires strategic efforts to resolve the complex tensions and historical grievances that fuel recurrent outbreaks of religion-related conflict.

Prioritizing the human right to freedom of religion or belief is a critical investment, not only in the security of Iraq, but in the nation's viability as a diverse, pluralistic, and democratic society. Policies and initiatives that address systemic causes of intolerance and conflict across all sectors of society — including the areas of government, civil society, education, security, and economic development — and promote greater respect for freedom of religion and belief can have tremendous implications on the trajectory of Iraq's future. Strategies to affect legal and social change in various sectors of society are integral to the protection of the rights and freedoms of all Iraqis, and progress in one sector can impact efforts in another sector. For example, greater respect for freedom of religion or belief in society can lead to a decrease in communal violence and increased security, which can in turn positively impact the economic development of a community historically trapped in cyclical violence caused by sectarian tensions or grievances.

A comprehensive post-ISIS Iraq policy should include legal and social reforms to promote freedom of religion or belief, which will lead to: improved governance and response to legal issues; a strengthened civil society and increase in social awareness; an increase in educational initiatives to promote the rights and freedoms of others; improved security and a decrease in local conflict; and economic development, including an increase in investment and tourism.

Governance

Encourage legal reforms during discourse with the Government of Iraq to ensure laws and policies relating to freedom of religion or belief support ongoing efforts to promote greater respect for the rights of all Iraqis.



Baba Sheikh, the spiritual leader of the Yazidis, reading Hardwired Freedom Guidebooks. Yazidis are a religious minority community that is persecuted by ISIS.

Iraq's citizens are weary from years of conflict, and strong support for laws and policies that protect freedom of religion or belief is essential to the future stability of the country. To prevent further sectarian conflict and atrocities against marginalized communities, the government must take steps to clearly and consistently recognize them as possessing equal rights and as integral partners in the country's future. To this end, the Government of Iraq can address and amend laws that discriminate against religious minority communities and ensure the policy priorities of minority communities are given due consideration.

Iraq's constitution offers limited protections for religious minority communities in the country. Islam is cited as the "foundation source of legislation".^{vi} The recognition or establishment of a state religion does not violate international standards of religious freedom as long as members of other religious groups are not discriminated against or prohibited from participating in society. However, prohibiting laws that contradict "established principles of Islam" make a religion, rather than the human dignity and rights of each individual citizen, the highest aim of the law. Consequently, laws and policies disproportionately favor members of the Muslim majority and restrict the religious freedom of non-Muslim citizens or dissenters.

While the constitution guarantees freedom of religion for members of the Muslim, Christian, Yazidi and Sabean-Mandean communities, there is no guarantee for members of communities not listed in the constitution, including Shabak, Jews, or Baha'i. Members of the Baha'i faith are prohibited from practicing their religion according to Law 105 of 1970. Personal status laws prohibit the conversion of Muslims from Islam to another religion. The national identity card, which is required to receive basic government

services, permits citizens to identify as Muslim, Christian, Yezidi or Sabean-Mandean. Those who adhere to other religions may only receive an identity card if they self-identify as Muslim.^{vii} Individuals who were forced to identify as Muslim on their identity cards are unable to regain their religious identity, and those who attempt to do so are often considered apostates.

According to members of religious and ethnic minority communities and NGOs, contradictions between constitutional guarantees for freedom of religion and discriminatory laws and policies remain unresolved. The efficacy of minority communities' efforts to reform discriminatory laws is undoubtedly affected by the underrepresentation of these groups in government positions. Only eight of 328 seats in the Council of Representatives are reserved for representatives of religious minority communities (five for Christians, one for a Yezidi, one for a Shabak, and one for a Sabean-Mandean)^{viii}. Moreover, human rights organizations and members of religious minority communities report that policy priorities and initiatives addressing concerns of these vulnerable communities are not given due consideration by the government.

In 2015, members of religious minority communities and human rights organizations opposed and protested Article 26 of the National Identify Card Law, which intended to unify the identity card process across Iraq. Provisions under Article 26 of the law impose restrictions on religious freedom. Article 26(1) of the proposed law states that a non-Muslim may change his religion "according to the law." However, no provision is made for a Muslim to legally change his or her religion. Article 26(2) of the proposed law would force children to register as Muslim without their consent — or the consent of the other parent — if one parent converts to Islam. Considering there is no provision for Muslims to legally change their religion, children who are registered as Muslim because of one parent's conversion are effectively coerced into an unalterable religious identity, even if they adhere to another religion. While the proposed bill was referred to the legislature for further amendment, religious minority communities seeking to influence the amendment process have reported little effort by the government to do so.

In recent years, the Kurdistan Regional Government has taken steps to ensure religious and ethnic communities in the region are represented in government. In 2015, they passed the Rights of National and Religious Minorities Protection Law, which promoted equal representation of minority groups within Iraqi Kurdistan. Consequently, the KRG's Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs appointed the first representative for the Jewish community, as well as representatives of the Zoroastrian, Baha'i, and other religious communities. The appointment of historically underrepresented religious communities is a significant and symbolic step towards greater respect for freedom of religion or belief in the region. The Kurdistan Regional Government can build on these developments to ensure representatives are equal and functional contributors to policy and governance decisions.

It is integral that the Central Government and Kurdistan Regional Government take steps to clearly and consistently recognize historically underrepresented religious groups as possessing equal rights as citizens of Iraq. To this end, the government can reform laws and policies which explicitly and disproportionately discriminate against marginalized religious communities and ensure representatives of these communities are recognized as equal partners in legal matters.

Appropriate reforms will require efforts by both the Central Government and Kurdistan Regional Government to not only develop policies promoting equal rights of all Iraqis, but to ensure policies are implemented and enforced across the country. The Central Government must also work with the Kurdistan Regional Government to ensure policy reforms within Iraqi Kurdistan can be effectively and freely implemented, as certain reform efforts — including reforms to identity card policies — require the support of the Central Government.

Both the Central Government and Kurdistan Regional Government stand at a critical juncture in legal reforms in the wake of ISIS, as Iraqi civilians question the security of their communities in their homeland.

By prioritizing legal reforms that affirm the equal rights of all Iraqis, the government can demonstrate its commitment to ending genocide and the historical sectarian division that fuels ongoing conflict.

Civil Society

Strengthen leaders in civil society to promote greater respect for freedom of religion or belief and address underlying societal biases that re-inforce or encourage intolerance.



Civil society leaders taking part in Hardwired training in Iraq.

Recurrent religion-related conflict is fueled by long-held biases, misconceptions and fears Iraqi citizens have toward one another. Recognizing the role of civil society in the country's stability and development, the United States and international community are considering strategies to strengthen civic engagement and promote reconciliation among Iraqis. Successful capacity-building programs and reconciliation initiatives must address the long-held, but often overlooked, views of intolerance, misunderstanding and mistrust among civil society. Training programs that resolve such misunderstandings and tensions will support unity and cohesion among a diverse group of civil society leaders and support broader efforts to secure legal and social reforms for the benefit of all Iraqis.

Civil society leaders in ISIS-affected communities have an opportunity to work together to promote greater respect for the rights and freedoms of all people, thereby deconstructing the intolerant and prejudiced paradigms ISIS established. These efforts are vital for communities specifically targeted in the genocide, including those in Sinjar and the Ninewah Plains, where victims remain fearful and distrusting of their neighbors. Reconciliation efforts and initiatives that focus solely on forgiveness will fall short in addressing the fears of victim communities, as history shows religion-related conflict is a recurring challenge in the

region. Rather, reconciliation efforts must cultivate a mutual commitment to the protection of all citizens, regardless of religious or ethnic identity.

Since 2015, Hardwired has worked with more than 60 men and women from various religious backgrounds in the fields of education, law, media, civil society, religious leadership, and government to develop a network of leaders who can promote greater respect for freedom of religion or belief across Iraq. Through the training program, leaders worked together to address the root causes of oppression – fears, intolerance, and abuse of religion that fuel government restrictions and societal hostility. Hardwired-trained leaders received extensive training on international human rights law as it relates to freedom of religion and belief, developed and implemented educational and advocacy programs related to their profession in their communities, and created a strong interfaith network of advocates and civil society leaders to address the legal and societal restraints on religious freedom. Today, they are actively replicating similar trainings among their communities and implementing the knowledge they gained to advocate for religious freedom – both for their own communities and for their neighbors.

Investment in civil society leaders and their efforts to lead legal and social reforms relating to freedom of religion or belief is integral to the long-term protection of religious diversity in Iraq. In-depth training and network development encourages a replication of leaders in the country, thereby ensuring stronger social protections for religious communities and broader support for efforts to promote freedom of religion or belief across various sectors of society.

Hardwired Approach: Strengthening Civil Society

Hardwired's training program for civil society leaders across Iraq produced an exponential increase in public awareness of the right to freedom of religion or belief as participants replicated the training and promoted this fundamental right in their individual areas of influence. As leaders continue to educate others, mitigate conflict, and develop innovative ways to promote religious freedom and greater respect for the rights of others, they are effectively creating a ripple effect in their communities and building resilience to extremism across society. Hardwired-trained leaders have demonstrated their commitment to promoting freedom of religion or belief across various sectors:

- A group of lawyers are working with other legal experts to propose reforms to discriminatory laws, including Article 26 of the National Identity Card Law.
- Journalists who participated in the program are producing stories focused on issues related to freedom of religion or belief for print and broadcast media, and are responsible for a significant increase in media attention to these issues, which were not often publicly addressed.
- A Muslim judge advocated for the inclusion of Christian and atheist perspectives in a meeting with other Muslim legal experts and advisors, and invited two members of the program to address his colleagues at a meeting in Baghdad.
- A teacher of displaced students in a school refused to separate boys from girls in his classroom, and explained to parents that such separation reflects the radical ideology of ISIS. Instead, he advocated for inclusion of all students in his classroom as equal members of the student body.

Education

Implement a strategy to deconstruct the radical ideologies youth were exposed to under ISIS and develop alternative paradigms through which children can understand and embrace freedom of religion or belief.



Iraqi students receiving Hardwired educational materials.

The geographical boundaries of the Islamic State’s self-proclaimed “Caliphate” are shrinking, but the imprint the group’s radical ideology has left in the hearts and minds of civilians — particularly youth — across the region remains. Recent reports following the liberation of Mosul and other ISIS-controlled territories provide chilling detail of life inside the Caliphate for children.

The indoctrination of youth was a significant component of the organization’s long-term strategy to establish the “Caliphate,” and the organization sought to bring up an entire generation of terrorists to further expand its borders. ISIS developed curricula to promote their radical ideology, and even lessons in arithmetic and literacy became channels through which children were indoctrinated. Girls were largely prohibited from attending school, and parents who did not want their children to become radicalized were forced to remove them from classes altogether.

The ideology propagated in the classroom was reinforced in the daily life of children in ISIS-controlled areas. ISIS further normalized youth to violence as they were regularly exposed to summary executions, beheadings, stoning, torture, gender-based violence and sexual abuse. Children were also recruited or coerced to serve as spies, preachers, executioners, foot soldiers, suicide bombers, and human shields.^{ix} Girls were subject to brutal sexual violence, and some as young as 5 years old were sold into sexual slavery.

ISIS showcased the regimented camps where children — known as “Cubs of the Caliphate” — were trained to fight and kill in the organization’s propaganda^X.

The impact of ISIS’s efforts to instill their ideology into the hearts and minds of youth extended beyond the territories they controlled. Hardwired-trained teachers working among communities across Iraq have reported chilling accounts of children demonstrating their understanding of ISIS through both fear and intrigue. A primary school teacher observed children playing a game on the playground in which they pretended to be ISIS militants and behead one another. These children were not in an area under ISIS control, yet they were familiar with their violent behavior and were drawn to the organization’s association with power. A teacher from Mosul shared that children who lived under ISIS control have accepted violence and hatred as normal. Another teacher from an area once under ISIS control works with a diverse group of displaced students in northern Iraq and reported that children from groups targeted by ISIS — including Yazidis and Christians — are fearful of their Muslim peers.

The Kurdistan Regional Government recently undertook a commendable initiative to reform religious education curricula across the region. These reforms come at an important juncture in the future of children across Iraq, who constitute the future of the country. According to officials, the reforms are intended to transition the religious education curricula from a theological focus to a historical and cultural focus, and the new curricula will include information on Iraq’s rich and diverse religious history.

Educators must be equipped to address the extremist views, fears, misconceptions and misunderstandings students developed through direct indoctrination by or exposure to ISIS. **To this end, Hardwired is working with educators across all subjects and age levels to design and implement curricula to help students (1) deconstruct these fears and misconceptions, (2) develop alternative paradigms through which they view and understand one another, and (3) promote greater acceptance for the rights and freedoms of others.** The curricula will serve as a vital resource and roadmap for educators in ISIS-affected territories as they reclaim the hearts and minds of youth from the organization’s radical ideology.

Hardwired’s programs for educators and for civil society leaders are closely connected, and a dual approach to promote freedom of religion or belief is integral to the overall development of greater respect for the rights of all people. The efforts of educators to promote these rights among youth are reinforced by the efforts of civil society leaders in the same community. Together, the efforts of both groups can address the influence of extremist ideology among youth, which is often rooted and modeled in individual homes and families.

The Ministry of Education, in conjunction with international partners and educators, can broadly implement programs that integrate curricula designed to deconstruct biases and promote greater understanding and respect for the rights of others across all subjects and student levels throughout Iraq. Recognizing extreme cases of indoctrination and radicalization among youth in ISIS-controlled territories, the Ministry of Education can establish separate, intensive education environments in which children can begin the process of re-education as they prepare for re-integration with the broader community.

Hardwired is working with educators in Iraq to develop curricula to promote the human right to freedom of religion or belief and help communities build resilience to extremism. This is the first program of its kind in the region, and is unique because it makes a connection between the human right to freedom of religion or belief and countering violent extremism. The two-year program includes extensive training for participating teachers, the development and implementation of lessons on FORB in their classrooms, and several assessments to determine their impact on students’ attitudes and behaviors related to the values that promote greater respect for the rights and freedoms of people of different beliefs.

Teachers in the program have reported significant developments in students' understanding of their right to religious freedom and respect for the rights of others in their community. One teacher in a school for displaced students in Duhok reported this program gave students and opportunity to speak about their experiences with others in a safe environment. Following the lesson, he reported students who had previously remained in isolated groups were more open and engaged with others from different communities. Recognizing the impact the program had on his students, another teacher and school director is planning to facilitate a training for every teacher in his school so they are able to address challenges to religious freedom and promote greater respect for these rights among all students.

Security

Prioritize policies and initiatives which ensure the restoration and protection of marginalized communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by ISIS, to support long-term security and development.

Following the liberation of ISIS-controlled territories, protection and reconciliation efforts will determine both immediate and long-term security in Iraq. To this end, it is imperative that the Government of Iraq prioritize security, reparations, and justice in a robust post-genocide response. Investments in these efforts can mitigate retaliatory attacks, support the restoration of communities which have been fractured along sensitive religious and ethnic lines, and ensure the long-term security of historically vulnerable communities across Iraq.

Reparations, Reconstruction, and Protection

The Government of Iraq must establish a formal plan to reconstruct and restore communities affected by ISIS through assistance in reclaiming properties, reconstruction of infrastructure (including homes, schools and public spaces), reparations, and security provisions for displaced persons re-entering communities liberated from ISIS.^{xi} Displaced persons from liberated territories, including Sinjar and Mosul, have reported challenges to returning to their villages, as limited efforts have been made to repair critical infrastructure and ensure the security and protection of returnees.

Justice and Accountability for Victims of ISIS

The Government of Iraq can work with the international community to establish a means to secure justice through formal prosecution of perpetrators of and those complicit in committing genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. By establishing a formal process to ensure justice and accountability, the government can help mitigate potential outbreaks of retaliatory violence or revenge killings. In addition to a formal structure for legal proceedings, the government can prioritize the protection of evidence of these crimes through the exhumation of mass graves and other formal measures to gather admissible evidence.

Resolution of Land Disputes Affecting Religious Minority Communities

The Central Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government have an opportunity to resolve a long-standing land dispute in the Ninewah Plains, which affects the security and economic utility of religious and ethnic minorities, including Assyrian, Shabak, Yezidi and Turkmen communities in the region. The Plains are part of the “disputed territories” between governments in Baghdad and Erbil. Inhabitants of the disputed territories have identified a legal basis for their right to practice self-determination and form a province, thereby increasing their independent legal authority and autonomy in accordance with Iraqi Law. Despite numerous proposals to settle the dispute, the issue remains unresolved. A resolution to the land dispute and the creation of a separate province for the Ninewah Plains — established in accordance with Iraqi law — could serve as a permanent refuge for the communities that have long inhabited the region and enable victim communities to exercise more independence and control in their security, governance and ultimately their survival in Iraq. However, provincial status and increased autonomy of the Ninewah Plains must be accompanied by robust reconciliation efforts to address conflicts

and grievances between community members in the wake of the genocide. Failure to address the fears and misconceptions community members have of one another in this diverse region could result in retaliatory attacks or increased hostility between groups, particularly between members of victim communities and their Muslim neighbors.

Psycho-Social Support for Victims of Genocide

Reports from victims who have escaped captivity and those living in recently liberated territories reveal the magnitude of the physical and emotional devastation ISIS caused among Iraqi civilians. The internal destruction in the hearts and minds of civilians who have endured extreme trauma in ISIS-controlled territories must be addressed to rebuild Iraq. The magnitude of this devastation and its implications for the future of Iraq will take years to assess, but swift and immediate intervention for victims of ISIS will mitigate its long-term effect on an entire generation.

Women and children abducted and enslaved by ISIS exhibit some of the most severe symptoms of trauma. Hardwired staff traveled to refugee and IDP camps across the region to interview members of the Yazidi community who escaped captivity. Victims exhibited signs of severe trauma, but displacement camps demonstrated extremely limited capacity to provide intensive and structured trauma support. Partners operating in the camps cited lack of formal training among medical professionals, lack of a structured and long-term program to support victims, and stigma surrounding psychological issues in the community as primary challenges for victims of ISIS on the path to rehabilitation.

The Government of Iraq and international partners must implement a robust psycho-social and trauma support strategy to address the immediate and long-term challenges for civilians affected by ISIS. This strategy should include intensive and structured psychological support for victims of sexual violence as well as a broad and comprehensive plan to rehabilitate youth across Iraq.

Hardwired's curricula can be a useful resource for educators to administer psycho-social support to their students. Hardwired presented their findings and recommendations for professionals engaged in rehabilitation efforts for victims of ISIS at the 2017 International Congress on Law and Mental Health in Prague. The best practices of psychosocial programs for trauma victims are inherent in Hardwired's teaching pedagogy. Since youth cannot process their emotions and trauma with words, teachers provide opportunities for youth to redirect their feelings and emotions through creative writing, art and drama. Youth are able to release the trauma they've experienced through indirect lessons that address religious intolerance and extremism in a safe environment. Over time, they find new ways of expressing themselves, reconciling their beliefs with the rights required for others in their society, and experiencing positive emotions that build respect for the religious freedom rights of others.

Economic Development

Efforts to promote freedom of religion or belief through legal and social reforms can directly impact the economic security and development of Iraq. Research has shown that greater respect for freedom of religion or belief is associated with positive levels of socioeconomic indicators. Countries with restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and social hostilities which provoke religion-related conflict are less likely to benefit from foreign investments, industry developments or tourism. Similarly, restrictions relating to freedom of religion or belief can directly impact the economic development of targeted communities, thereby reinforcing marginalization and tensions between minority and majority communities. But greater respect for freedom of religion or belief can remove such impediments to successful business ventures, encourage foreign investment, and economic growth.^{xii}

As the Government of Iraq makes efforts to resolve systemic causes of conflict in the region and experiences greater security, the country can benefit from increased opportunities for investments, industry development, and tourism. Legal and social reforms can also ensure greater economic stability for historically marginalized minority groups, as discriminatory policies and social biases can disproportionately affect these communities. Such policy reforms can include greater integration and inclusion of minorities in the economic sector. Members of minority groups report widespread discrimination in employment opportunities, most notably for government regulated positions, which comprise a significant number of job opportunities in the country. Moreover, Iraq is home to numerous historically significant religious sites for ancient faith communities, and further development and security in the region presents a new opportunity for the Central Government and Kurdistan Regional Government to promote tourism to these areas.

As policies promoting greater respect for freedom of religion or belief build resilience to extremism within Iraqi society, the country will experience fewer outbreaks of violent extremism and communal violence, which will protect communities from displacement, the destruction of infrastructure, and further economic collapse. The international community also stands to benefit, as addressing the underlying causes of conflict will ultimately end recurrent military and humanitarian interventions.

Summary of Recommendations

The United States is in a unique position to course-correct years of frail and reactionary policies which ultimately failed to address the complex tensions and historical grievances that fuel religion-related conflict in Iraq. Efforts to prioritize the human right to freedom of religion or belief across all sectors of society can ultimately lead to greater resilience to extremism, decreased social hostilities and communal violence, improved governance, and increased security and stability in the country.

The United States can immediately begin to prioritize policies to achieve this end in discussions and negotiations with the Government of Iraq. *If the Government of Iraq will not recognize and affirm the religious identity of all Iraqis at this juncture, how can religious communities who faced utter erasure from their homeland be assured of a safe and equal future after ISIS is defeated?* To hold the government accountable for the protection of all its citizens, the United States should consider conditioning all aid to Iraq on marked improvements in respect for and equal treatment of vulnerable religious communities.

To this end, Hardwired proposes the following priorities be taken into consideration in the United States' post-ISIS response in Iraq:

Governance: Encourage legal reforms during discourse with the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government to ensure: (1) laws and policies relating to freedom of religion or belief support ongoing efforts to counter extremism and promote greater respect for the rights of all Iraqis; (2) religious and ethnic minority communities are recognized as possessing equal rights as citizens; and (3) representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities are included in legislative discourse and processes.

Civil Society: Increase social awareness and engagement among civil society by promoting programs that: (1) strengthen efforts of leaders in the fields of government, education, media, law, religious leadership, and other areas of civil society to promote greater respect for freedom of religion or belief; and (2) support ongoing efforts by civil society leaders to promote legal and social change.

Education: Support efforts by the Ministry of Education, in partnership with international partners and educators, to implement programs that: (1) integrate curricula designed to deconstruct biases and promote greater respect for freedom of religion or belief among youth across Iraq; and (2) provide appropriate intensive support for youth who have experienced high levels of indoctrination or radicalization under ISIS.

Security: Prioritize policies and initiatives which ensure the restoration and protection of marginalized communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by ISIS, including: (1) reconstruction, reparation, and protection efforts for affected communities; (2) justice and accountability efforts, including a formal strategy to hold perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes accountable; and (3) renewed engagement by both the Central Government and Kurdistan Regional Government to resolve long-standing land disputes in the Ninewah Plains.

Economic Development: Recognize immediate and long-term economic benefits greater respect for freedom of religion or belief can bring Iraq and the international community, including: (1) greater opportunities for foreign investment, industry development, and tourism; and (2) resolution to humanitarian and military interventions by the United States and international community in response to conflict.

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Tina Ramirez is Founder and President of Hardwired Global. Tina has spent the past 14 years defending oppressed communities in more than 30 countries. She taught in public schools before transitioning into public policy as a researcher for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and then with the U.S. Congress where she founded and directed the bi-partisan Congressional International Religious Freedom Caucus. She directed international programs and government relations at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. Tina holds a B.A. in History and Political Science and a M.A. in Education from Vanguard University in California, a M.A. in Human Rights from the University of Essex in the U.K., and a certificate from the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. She was a contributing author and editor of *Human Rights in the United States: A Dictionary and Documents* (2010, 2017) and *Restricted Nations: Iraq* (VOM, 2017). In 2012, Tina was awarded the Second Annual Ahmadiyya Muslim Humanitarian Award. She previously served as Vice President of the UN NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief in New York and as a board member for the Richmond based First Freedom Center. Tina has testified before the U.S. Congress, the United Nations, and the African Union.

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- ⁱ "Iraq." *Annual Report 2017*. US Commission on International Religious Freedom. <http://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Iraq.2017.pdf>
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