



# The Mandaean Society of America



## **The Sabian Mandaeans Face a Critical Moment in their History**

**Report Prepared by the Mandaean Human Rights Group**

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The Mandaean Society of America  
19 Ketch Road  
Morristown, NJ 07960, USA  
Email: [snashi@optonline.net](mailto:snashi@optonline.net)  
Website: [www.mandaeanunion.net](http://www.mandaeanunion.net)  
Fax: (973) 292 3906  
Tel: (973) 292 0309



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## Introduction

Mandaeanism is a religious sect of great antiquity that is comprised of a monotheistic belief system whose main elements emphasize marriage, family, and living a peaceful existence. Neither Christian, Muslim, Jewish nor Zoroasterism in their religious dogma, the Mandaeans today represent the last of a once wide spread religion that has existed since pre-Christian times and whose boundaries extended from Egypt to Palestine and down through the Mesopotamian lands. Today adherents of the faith can be found in most large cities in Iraq and in the lands of the lower Euphrates, the lower Tigris, the rivers that surround the Shatt-al-Arab, and in the adjacent Iranian Province of Khuzestan.

The Mandaeans have been able to maintain their religious codes, unique language, culture, and sacred scriptures despite overwhelming odds at various times in history. Secular information as provided by the Mandaeans is vague, with the Mandaean literature concentrating mostly on rituals, specifically liturgies and prayers. The Mandaean doctrine claims no founder, instead asserting that they are descended from Adam, who was the first to receive the complex religious instructions of the Mandaeans. Their last great teacher and healer was John the Baptist.

The Mandaeans have always sought to live near a river, for this an essential part of their daily rituals. The Mandaeans are well known for their baptismal rituals, which are performed mainly on Sundays in a free flowing river, reminiscent of a forgotten bygone era. The ethics of Mandaeans apply to all—man or woman, priest or layman—and reinforce the ideas of monogamy, family, pacifism, dietary laws, and alms-giving.

Although the Mandaeans have existed possibly back to the time of the Pharaohs, there has been very little written information regarding these people before the 20th century. At the present time, research on the Mandaeans is limited to a small population of scholars.

The Mandaeans have endured severe discrimination in employment, education, and the legal system. This in conjunction with forced military service and social stigma has forced over 12000 Mandaeans to flee from Iraq in the past fifteen years alone. They can now be found in limited numbers in Australia, Europe, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.

Many Mandaeans worldwide are awaiting refugee status in their new host countries. They are determined to live a life free from persecution, where they can openly worship without fear of retaliation from the local Islamic presence. Using a conservative guess, currently, the Mandaeans number around one hundred thousand in Iraq (There is no census to give an accurate account). It is estimated that Iran has a population of 5,000 to 10,000.

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## A Brief Summary of the Persecution of Mandaeans Throughout History

### Ancient History

During their entire history Mandaean (also called Sabian Mandaean) have been subject to all kinds of persecution. The Mandaean population was at one point numbered in the hundreds of thousands, possibly the millions, and was spread over many regions (countries) such as Jordan, Israel and Egypt. Their conflicts with other beliefs and powers that ruled these regions forced them several times to emigrate and seek refuge and safe haven in other parts of the Middle East. They settled in northern and southern Mesopotamia (what is now Iraq) and have managed to live and practice their peaceful beliefs through the last 2000 years. After the Islamic invasion of Iraq, thousands of Mandaean were forced to convert to Islam. The remainder had to struggle to survive using all means available to convince the Muslims to leave them alone as “people of the book”. They sometimes changed places of living, paid ransoms, debated and discussed their case, or simply camouflaged.

The Mandaean are the Sabians who were mentioned in the Koran (The Islamic Holy book):

*"Those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve."*

*"Those who believe and the Jews and the Sabians [Sabians] and this Christians— whoever believes in God and the last day and does good they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve."*

*"Those who believe and those how are the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians and the Magians [Zoroastrians] and those who set up gods (with God) -- God will decide between them on the day of resurrection for God is a Witness over all things."*

In the early Islamic era in Iraq, the fate of the Mandaean was in the hands of Islamic ruler (the Kalifa) of Iraq. During that era, the Mandaean had occasionally been recognized for their skills, intelligence, knowledge, medical skills and intellectual work (like poetry) and were used in positions utilizing these skills and knowledge. In other times, if the Kalifas and/or the Imams of Islam had another interpretation<sup>2</sup> of the Qura'an, the Mandaean were treated as infidels (disbelievers) and were subjected to brutal persecutions; many were forced to choose between converting to Islam or being killed. In one of these massacres, every Mandaean priest was sentenced to be slaughtered on an apparent Fatwa from one of the Muslim Imams, but because of their survival instinct and creativity they managed to outlive this period.

The Mandaean were again forced to seek a safer place and to escape this new persecution. They settled in the southern part of Iraq and Iran near the marshland of Umara and Nasria and resolved themselves to secrecy as another form of survival<sup>2</sup>. Since the Islamic era, the Mandaean have been treated as second-

class citizens, in every aspect of life, in the land where they have lived for thousands of years. In centuries past, though, the ability to relocate to avoid persecution was fairly simple for the small groups of people. In recent times, however, the Mandaeans are not able to move at will and therefore have had to blend into the surrounding Islamic society or immigrate to countries where religious freedom is honored and protected.

The Mandaeans have always tried to appease the Muslims in order to survive. This is the only reason why they still exist within the rigid Islamic walls. Over the centuries the Mandaeans have found it more and more difficult to separate them from Islamic influence. This is especially apparent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mandaean culture and language has become more and more Arabized or Persianized due to cultural pressures. As the Mandaeans became exposed to the western society and modernization which flooded the area by the 1950 and 1960's their religion took another turn. Mandaeans, like all cultures, wanted the advantages of education, good jobs, decent housing, and security for their children. However they were not allowed to have their own schools, so, in order to achieve these goals, they had to deny certain Mandaean mandates. For instance as Mandaean children attended schools, they were required to cut their hair; this is in direct violation to Mandaean dictates. This has presented added problems, as the sons of priests are barred from the priesthood if they cut their hair, this forced act has dwindled the pool of priests.

### Recent History

While the 20<sup>th</sup> century has opened the door to a vast wealth of anthropological information, it has also brought a certain destruction to the people. Ever since the onset of Islamic influence, the Mandaeans have become closed mouth concerning all religious activities. In fact, the Mandaeans are so fearful of persecution that even in today's world many Mandaeans will give conflicting stories regarding themselves or their culture. When confronted on what their religion is, a Mandaean will say that it is similar to your religion.

With the Mandaeans becoming surrounded by Muslim neighbors and working and buying in Muslim business, they have recently taken to blending into the surrounding culture. This camouflage has been achieved by employing a variety of cosmetic techniques, such as naming children with Muslim associated names rather than traditional Mandaean names, learning the basic Muslim customs, religious customs, and rituals so that one may pass in time of harassment, and finally wearing lay clothes similar to the average Muslim. These techniques do not defile or pollute the religion since they are not covered by Mandaean codes. Thus, if the time comes when extermination is enviable, there will be those who can escape and survive, thus assuring the continuance of the Mandaean religion. This fear of eventual extermination has evolved from the increased Islamic pressure in recent decades, especially since the Islamic revolution in Iran and its influence on the Muslims in Iraq and the surge in Islamic extremism in the Middle East.

Although Iraq is generally considered a secular state, most of the laws are Islamic laws or inspired by the Qura'an (the Islamic Holy Book). The recent government was mainly Sunni Muslim and the ruling family was from one clan. Under their law, the Mandaeans are supposed to be dealt with as a "people of the book" as described above, but this protection was not honored. The interpretation of the Qura'an verse about the Mandaeans has never clear or consistent throughout Islam. For example, Alkuee (A Shiaat's Islamic leader) in 1979 recognized the Mandaeans as People of the Book; however Khumaini (another Shiaat's leader in Iran) did not.

Several factors have affected Iraq in recent history that effected mandaeans directly and indirectly:

### *First Factor: The Dictatorship*

The dictatorship affecting the Iraqi society over the last several decades has been brutal. This dictatorship held an iron grip over all Iraqis and has stained recent history with terror and the blood of the innocent. The Mandaeans took their share of misery and pain in the suffering that occurred. Hundreds of their young men and women were either killed, vanished, or were condemned to horrible tortures and unspeakable acts over the last forty years. The concept of freedom in that regime, especially religious freedom, was directly correlated with the observance of the personal favors and mandates demanded of Saddam Hussein and the Baath regime.<sup>1</sup> The Mandaeans were no different; they suffered politically, economically, socially, and religiously from the persecution that has occurred against them.

Additionally, Mandaean men, women, and even children were forced to carry weapons and serve in the military. This was in direct contradiction to the pacifistic nature of Mandaeanism.

The Mandaeans have endured severe discrimination in employment, education, the legal system, forced military service, and social shunning. And this has forced over 12,000 of the Mandaeans to flee from Iraq in the past ten years. This represents a major percentage of the total numbers of the Mandaeans in Iraq, making them the most affected minority. Interference of the authorities in religious matters and decisions has caused many of the Mandaean priests to leave Iraq in the past few years. Several hundreds of Mandaeans have died during Saddam rule for trying to express their thoughts in public.

### *Second Factor; The Increase in Islamic Extremism*

Islamic extremism has surged for several reasons but most important of which are the Islamic revolution in Iran, the increase in shia'a extremism in Iran and Iraq, and the increase in Wahabism from the Arabian Peninsula.

Whabeeism is an Islamic faith dominant in the Arabian Peninsula. It carries, in addition to other things, an extremist view of how Muslims should deal with other religions like Christianity, Judaism, and Mandaism. Un-acceptance and conversion is the only solution that the leaders of this sect will accept. This sect is now spreading in Iraq and Europe through the direct support of wealthy Muslims in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. The followers of this sect are using any and all means available to them, including money, threats and intimidation, to convert other religious minority members like Mandaeans to Islam. These tactics are highly successful on families living in small Iraqi towns with little or no community support. The use of threats and intimidation along with the families' poverty went forced them to surrender completely and accept their fate. This sect is also targeting Mandaeans in other areas, like Gulf countries and Europe

### *Third Factor: The Sanctions*

The sanctions led to the destruction of the Iraq's economic and moral infrastructure and led to a surge in Islamic extremism. The misery caused fanatic ideas to pour forth, including the common belief that God was punishing them for the atheists in their midst. Because of this, Mandaeans are being pressed to convert to Islam. A campaign led by Muslim clergymen, taking advantage of poverty and using threats of death, has succeeded since 1996 in the conversion of several families in the cities of Falouja, Ramadi and Umara. In addition, corruption and crime have risen to an astonishing degree, targeting the weaker parts of the society that have no protection from major tribes or high-ranking party members and army officials. The minorities, especially the Mandaeans, are the easiest prey. The Mandaeans refuse to carry

weapons, believing that both the killer and the killed will suffer in the afterlife. Their main form of self-defense is pacifism, escape, and avoidance of conflict, making them the prime target for these persecutions.

The Mandaean, being a humble people devoted to pacifism, have never played a major part in the field of politics. In no way have they been a warlike people and their whole history, as well as their literature, shows that they were able to offer only a weak resistance, at the very best, to persecution and attacks upon their religion.

The Mandaean Human Rights Group has issued a document in 2002 giving examples of these atrocities in the legal system, education, employment and social environment.

### **Mandaeans after the Liberation of Iraq**

In April of 2003, the Coalition forces intervened in Iraq and removed one of the most atrocious tyrants of the last century. However, the Mandaean plight did not end with this regime. A new and very troubling situation is arising that may surpass Saddam's cruel claw. The recent surge in religious extremism and the fight for power among political fractions has caused such a lack of security as to make Mandaean lives in some areas of the country even worse. It may be true that this is a general result of lawlessness in Iraq, but usually the weakest members in the community pay the price. The Mandaeans who carry no weapons, who will not kill, and have no social establishment to defend them, are the first and easiest targets. In several Friday sermons in Sadder city, Baghdad, Falouja, and Basra extremist clerics have declared that it is religiously accepted to take money, property, and even women from the infidels as long as they pay a percentage for the "Islamic cause."

Information recently obtained from Iraq documents some of these atrocities against the Mandaean people:

April 23, 2003: At 11:00 am in Fadha', (name held for protection of Family) was murdered publicly in front of a large crowd. He had begged for mercy according to the tribal customs, which ensure the full protection for the one who asks any tribe for asylum. The man was murdered and the crime is a Mandaean infidel

May 2003: The murder of (name held for protection of Family) in his house in "New Baghdad" city, followed by the theft of his jewelry and money anti Mandaean slogans where shouted while the killing and looting was taking place.

May 2003: The kidnapping and assault of (name held for protection of Family) a Mandaean girl.

May 2003: Twenty-nine old, (name held for protection of Family) Mandaean girl was kidnapped in Baghdad

May 2003: The arson of the alcohol brewery and looting of belongings of (name held for protection of Family) in Baquba city.

May 7, 2003: The Mandaean community in Baghdad was terrified by the brutal attack on (name held for protection of Family) his pregnant wife and their four children ages 10, 7, 4, and 2 in their house in Sidiah, Baghdad by thugs shouting religious slurs against the Mandaean religion.

May 15, 2003: (name held for protection of Family), accused of practicing 'Magic,' was murdered by agunman in Sowerah.

The burning of a house and personal property in Hawijah (Kerkuk province). This act of arson was consummated in the murder of a handicapped 23-year-old Mandaean girl who was unable to flee the house.

April through June of 2003 saw the destruction of homes and businesses with explosives in Kut / Sowerah city. The criminals who perpetrated these bombing attacks were well-known Muslim extremists from the area. The following is a list of the victims:

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| 1) (name held for protection of Family) | April, 20, 2003 |
| 2) (name held for protection of Family) | June, 13, 2003  |
| 3) (name held for protection of Family) | June, 15, 2003  |
| 4) (name held for protection of Family) | June, 20, 2003  |
| 5) (name held for protection of Family) | June, 20, 2003  |

June, 10, 2003: The residences of (name held for protection of Family) and (name held for protection of Family) were both damaged in two separate grenade attacks upon their homes and asked to leave the area or be killed.

In Sowerah, a Mandaean girl named (name held for protection of Family) survived an attempt of rape.

June 10<sup>th</sup> a bomb was detonated at the house of (name held for protection of Family) in Kadessia City. When the bomb failed to do the expected damage, subsequent machine gun fire riddled the house and destroyed it.

June 15<sup>th</sup> Sam (name held for protection of Family) was assaulted by gunshots in Sowerah.

June 26, 2003: (name held for protection of Family) was assaulted by mobs accusing him of practicing 'Magic' and was promptly executed by gunshot in Sowerah.

(name held for protection of Family) suffered gunfire and smashing of glass of their store while they were inside it. This act was committed by unknown person(s). The excuse given for the assault was 'the selling of alcoholic drinks'.

July 2<sup>nd</sup> an armed assault with an attempt to murder was directed at both {Sheikh} (name held for protection of Family) and his brother (name held for protection of Family) for being Mandaean priests.

Threats of death were sent to (name held for protection of Family) and her 7-year-old daughter unless she converted to Islam. This action forced the woman to escape with her daughter out of the area. This happened in Baghdad, Thawrah City, and sector 31.

Six Mandaean jewelry stores were damaged by gunfire on a single night in Thawra City. The original intent was to kill the owners. The following statement was written on one of the six stores: "Your day is coming sobba!" Sobba (Sobi) is a name used quite frequently by the local Muslims instead of the term Mandaean.

Attaching of leaflets in the jewelry shopping center of Al Jamhuria City in Basra in which the Madaeans are accused of Magic and fornication, then threatened with severe punishment soon.

Harassment of the Mandaeans in city of Falouja and forcefully converting them to Islam. If the Mandaeans did not comply they were forced out of Falouja. The Mandaeans, as non-Muslim, should be treated like the Americans and kicked away as both are infidels.

July 3 Physical assault and robbery (name held for protection of Family) and (name held for protection of Family) in their jewelry store in Baghdad - Habibia city by the use of grenades in public (in front of crowds)

And assault and threat on (name held for protection of Family) demanding a payment of ransom or leave the area or be killed.

July 7, 2003: An armed robbery and physical assault of (name held for protection of Family) in Baghdad (Karrada), in front of dozens of witnesses. These acts were combined with the use of ethnic and religious slurs used against the person

July, 02, 2003: (name held for protection of Family), age 29, was kidnapped in the city of Baghdad, Al shurta 5<sup>th</sup>. No signs of her, living or dead have yet been uncovered.

July 11, 2003: Attacking and murder of (name held for protection of Family) a Mandaean young man going to work in the morning.

The kidnapping of (name held for protection of Family) son in Basrah. The kidnappers demanded his family to pay a ransom. He was released with the help of the British forces. No sooner had the boy been returned home, the kidnappers terrorized the family again this time with messages that all 'Sobba' (Mandaeans) would die. The family escaped the area.

Many independent sources have documented and confirmed the deteriorating conditions of minorities in different parts of Iraq. From "The Institute of Religion and Democracy" (October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2003):

"Militant Muslims continue to target Christians and Mandaeans (followers of John the Baptist) in sectarian killings, rapes and kidnappings in Iraq. On 20 October, Danny Isaac and William Cesar, both Assyrian Christians, were shot to death in front of their houses in Al Khardia. In mid October, a group of Muslim men kidnapped Lena Faisal Al-Khamisi (25), a Mandaean woman who works in a hospital in Baghdad. Her whereabouts is unknown. Just days ago, Satar Razi Zaboun, a Mandaean man aged about 50, was shot in Baghdad. These are only the tip of the iceberg. The situation in Iraq is most concerning and particularly dangerous for Christians and Mandaeans. They are very vulnerable as they can be robbed, raped and murdered with impunity. Please pray for God's intervention, and for their protection and deliverance from evil."<sup>ii</sup>

In recent publication titled "The Democracy Watch Report #1" the following is noted:

"Religious zealots have imposed other restrictions. Attacks on Christian-owned shops that sell alcohol are common, and some have been burned down. Some groups have also distributed leaflets against shopkeepers who sell CDs and videos, and ordered a ban on the sale of any but religious recordings. The Mandaeans, a religious minority that has lived peacefully in southern Iraq since ancient times, has also been vilified and condemned as satanic. Such intimidation and threats pose a serious threat to individual liberties, and in the absence of protective laws or consequences, they are likely to escalate."<sup>iii</sup>

According to Dr. Edward Crangle from the Department of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney:

“...since the demise of the recent Iraqi regime, many Sabian[sic] Mandaeans have been murdered by various extremist Muslim groups and tribes, including the extremely fundamentalist religious Sunni and Shi'a[sic] groups.”<sup>iv</sup>

Recently in Basra a distribution of leaflets, in Al-Tanuma Square, calling on Sunnis, Christians and Mandaeans to leave the city (Basra) has been reported.<sup>v</sup> Several of the Mandaean families, along with thousands of Christian families, have started to flee Basra along heading to safer areas.

The Mandaean leadership in Iraq has met with representatives of the Coalition forces, the Iraqi Governing Council and representatives of different political and religious groups there. They have presented their requests for religious freedom and social justice for their people in a free and democratic Iraq. However, as politics unfold in Iraq, the Mandaeans do not trust the future as the Coalition or the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) has promised. This, combined with the recent decree (number 137, dated December 29, 2003) which canceled the fifty year old ‘Personal Affairs Law’ and returned all personal matters to the Islamic Law known as Sharia, has raised a lot of concerns in the Mandaean community in Iraq and they fear the promises made to them may not be honored.

In June 2004 the Supreme Mandaeans Religious Council in Iraq issued a statement calling for all international bodies, religious leaders, and governments to interfere to stop the attacks against Mandaeans. The statement called upon the Islamic religious leaders both in and out of Iraq to give Fetwas to stop the attacks against the “people of the book”. The statement was in response to the kidnappings and rapes of several young Mandaean girls. The council also issued a report citing incidents of killings, kidnappings, rapes, and robberies with religious hatred at their core. (Some of the incidents reported were covered in the July 24, 2004 issue of Times Magazine).

In the last few months, Islamic fundamentalists and others have continued to terrorize Iraqi minorities, namely Christians and Mandaeans, with the intent of forcing them to leave the country. These actions are aimed partly to discredit the liberation of Iraq and partly because of religious hatred. In the first two weeks of November 2004, letters, signed by the Islamic Mujahideen Group, were distributed to Mandaean homes and businesses threatening that all Mandaeans should either convert to Islam, leave the county, or be killed by the sword. Several Mandaean physicians, businessmen, and shop owners have stopped going to work for fear of their lives. Many are planning to leave the country.

The Mandaeans in Iraq continue to be targeted and killed. The following are few recent examples:

Mr. Rihad Radi Habib, the leader of the Mandaean community in Basra, was assassinated on 1/16/2005 in front of his two children by two gun men.

Mr. Mazin Majid Al-Sabiri (45y) was killed in his shop on 12/10/2004 .

Mr. Wasfi Majid Khashkool (35Y) was killed by a gunman in his shop Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, 05. Nothing was stolen.

Mr Waleed Al-Khilani was killed in front of his house 2/28/2005.

Additionally, death threats have been distributed to several Mandaean households in several areas of Baghdad.

The kidnapping of Mandaean men, women, and children has escalated to such a level that many have either fled to Jordan and Syria or have confined themselves to their homes. Most of the cases of kidnapping and rape go undocumented because of the distrust in the ability of the local police for protection, the fear of revenge, and the social stigma involved.

## **Iraqi Elections and the Future Constitution**

The recent elections in Iraq have given hope to the Iraqi people for a decent, free life. The Mandaeans, however, citing their long term injustice, fear that the ideology behind an Islamic constitution and government can not be trusted to respect minority rights. There is an intrinsic conflict between true democracy and Islamic ideology. Our community is now worried that fundamental Islamic powers will push towards an Islamic constitution and an Islamic state that will allow and deny human rights according to one source—the Qura'an. The Mandaeans fear that eventually there will be religious rulings affecting the welfare of non Muslims, as has happened in Iran and Afghanistan. We can not accept that our fate be again in the hands of these religious clerics.

As expected, no representative of the Mandaean people could reach the new parliament. The Mandaeans want the right to live in peace in Iraq with full control of their internal religious and personal affairs, equal opportunity in education and jobs, and full legal recognition. These rights currently have no way of being expressed either to the new parliament or to the committee writing the new constitution. We feel that the international community and the Coalition forces have a direct moral and legal responsibility to protect the rights of Mandaeans in Iraq. It is imperative for a democratic Iraq that Mandaeans and other minorities are represented in these discussions.

## **Mandaean Refugees**

With the fanatical Muslim thoughts dominating the streets, many Mandaeans are being intimidated. Thousands are now escaping Iraq and living without status in Jordan and Syria. They are applying to different countries with the hope of attaining refugee status.

But, even before the liberation, thousands of persecuted Mandaeans tried to flee the country. Some of these people have been stranded in limbo in countries such as Yemen and Indonesia for more than four years. We are looking to the international community and the United States for help in ending their suffering.

### Mandaeans in Indonesia

About 230 Mandaeans have escaped Iraq to Indonesia looking for safe refuge in the last four years. They are denied any form of religious freedom in that Muslim country and are forced to conceal their identity and religion. Some have been accepted by the UNHCR and while others have been rejected and are currently waiting for their cases to be reviewed with more recognition of their plight. They cannot return to Iraq, and they cannot stay in Indonesia.. We are looking forward to a solution for this human rights tragedy. ( Names available for Human Rights Organizations)

### Mandaeans in Yemen and the Gulf countries.

In Yemen around fifty families have been accepted by the UNHCR as refugees and were promised resettlement by the United States. Unfortunately, this process has been indefinitely on hold since 2001. These refugees conceal their identity and religion in Yemen, as the public views about Mandaeans there are even worse than those in Iraq. Yemen, and other Gulf countries view all non-Muslims as infidels who

should either convert or suffer such consequences as force conversion, intimidation, and denial of jobs and places to live such as apartment rentals. There are more than eighty Mandaeans in Yemen; many are still waiting UNHRC approval. All are in need for resettlement. However none of the countries that accept resettlement have looked into their case seriously and they are kept to face their fate with no solution in sight. These families are in urgent need for resettlement (Names available for Human Rights Organizations)

### Mandaeans in Europe

Some of the European countries are revising their immigration status, especially regarding Iraqi refugees. Many plans are in the works to return those refugees to Iraq. This policy does not differentiate between the any of the Iraqi refugees or their problems. The Mandaeans are faced with the threat of being forced to return to the same places and problems they escaped from. In Denmark, for example, letters have been sent to all Mandaean refugees stating their date of deportation and informing them of the stoppage of financial assistance. The same ideas are circulating in other European countries. (Names available for Human Rights Organizations)

### What do the Mandaeans want?

It is evident that the process of building democracy in Iraq will be long and arduous. The first priority for all involved includes establishing security and lawfulness and developing a system that will guarantee the continuation of democracy and freedom of thought. We hope that all generations will be instilled with ideas of fairness, justice and respect of human rights. Extremist that embrace violence and hate against minorities should be punished by law. A peaceful secular states should be encouraged in the new democratic Iraq, while the oppressive theocracy and ongoing violence that threatens to invade must be shut out. Mandaeans await the day they will be able to live in peace in a free Iraq. The following can summarize the Iraqi Mandaean aspirations:

- The future constitution of Iraq should guarantee minorities such as Mandaeans seats in any future parliament.
- During the formation of a new Iraq, emphasis to stop to all religious persecution and social discrimination be enacted and a motion set into place where a protective shield will exist for the minorities in regards to social, legal, educational, or political aspects.
- Full legal recognition and constitutional protection for Mandaeans in a new Iraq.
- Full control of Mandaean internal religious affairs with no outside interference.
- Prohibit by law the forceful conversion of any Mandaean. This law should also cover minors and give the right for all those forcefully converted to convert back to Mandaeanism without fear of death.
- Building a legal system that is fair to all citizens, regardless of their affiliations. Special emphasis should be put on re-educating the current judges and a system of monitoring their rulings should be put in place to ensure their fairness.
- Assistance for various Mandaean community establishments. In Iraq this aid is needed most urgently for education and basic human needs. There is also a need to ensure the continued existence of the Mandaean people as an important sector of human culture and heritage.
- Prohibit the drafting of Mandaeans in the army as armed combatants. The carrying of weapons is in direct violation of Mandaean religious laws.

Mandaeans in countries of refuge face different problems and needs which can be summarized as follows:

- Full refugee status for all the Mandaean refugees, especially those in Indonesia, Yemen, Jordan, and Syria, with fast and proper resettlement. Aid must be available for those who choose to return to Iraq, especially since most lost everything with their escape.
- Prevent the forceful return of Mandaean from their countries of refuge until the circumstances in Iraq become more hospitable to them.
- The international community should offer all forms of support, including financial aid, to the Mandaean communities in Diaspora in order to build their communities and preserve their culture and language, as it is an important part of human heritage.
- Most of the Mandaean leaving Iraq are applying now to Australia. The growing community there has reached about three thousand. We have three priests and a school and are in the process of building a Mandi (prayer place). Australia could well be a savior to lots of these refugees and, in the long run, a safe haven to this ancient religion. But, without the help of the United States and the international community, this could prove difficult to achieve.

## Conclusion

The Mandaean have lived in Iraq and Iran for thousands of years. They have tolerated all kinds of persecution and mistreatment and learned how to deal with them. However, what they are facing now is a real threat to their continued existence.

The UNHCR, the International Community, the Coalition Forces, and The Iraqi Government must recognize the rights of the Mandaean people and their historic persecution. Support must be generated to ensure their survival both inside and outside Iraq and Iran.

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<sup>i</sup> International Religious Freedom Report 2003 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.ird-renew.org/Liberty/Liberty.cfm?ID=751&c=29>

<sup>iii</sup> Democracy Watch: Report # 1 on the Situation in Iraq September 26, 2003  
by Rend Rahim Francke, Iraqi Ambassador to USA  
The Iraq Foundation <http://www.iraq4u.com/applications/news/anmviewer.asp?a=1355&z=13Iraq>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://swac.org.au/soap-updates.htm>  
Springwood Winmalee Anglican Church Updates on persecution

<sup>v</sup> al-Zaman News Paper <http://www.juancole.com/>