



Universal Periodic Review Stakeholders Report

## Iraq: Freedom of Religion and the Status of the Evangelical Churches

Submitted to the Human Rights Council ahead of the Universal Periodic Review of Iraq during the UPR 34<sup>th</sup> session.

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**Report submitted by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).** The WEA was founded in 1846 in London. Today, the WEA is a network of churches in 129 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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1. While declaring that Islam is the official religion of the state, the Iraqi Constitution guarantees Freedom of Religion or Belief to all. In practice, Iraqi Christians enjoy a great amount of freedom to practice their faith in private and in public. However, Iraq's evangelical churches have been denied, to-date, legal status and recognition.
2. In Iraq, there are three *diwans* (chambers) responsible for administering matters for the recognized religious groups within the country: the Sunni Endowment Diwan, the Shia Endowment Diwan, and the Endowment of the Christians, Yezidi, and Sabaeen-Mandaean Religions Diwan.<sup>1</sup> These three *waqfs* (religious endowment) operate under the authority of the prime minister's office.
3. The General Society for Iraqi National Evangelical Churches (GSINEC) is the umbrella association for Iraqi Evangelical Churches, and is registered as a non-government organization. The GSINEC is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance.<sup>2</sup>
4. Since 2003, the GSINEC has requested from the consecutive Iraqi governments the legal recognition of the Evangelical churches and affiliation with the Christian *waqf*, knowing that this *waqf* is a governmental institution. However, these consecutive governments have denied the Evangelical churches legal registration and recognition.
5. Therefore, today, with the exception of the Presbyterian Evangelical Protestant church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church, members of Iraq's Evangelical churches suffer from a violation to their right to Freedom of Religion or Belief including the right to manifest their religion.
6. The implication of non-recognition includes the inability for the churches to open a bank account, the inability to own and register property including real, the denial of tax and customs exemption, the inability to produce religious publications, and the inability to operate charitable, social and educational institutions including kindergartens and clinics.
7. Iraq has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which protects, in its article 18, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Article 18 declares that this right includes the freedom, in community with others and in public, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
8. Article 6 of the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief outlines several freedoms inherent in the right to manifest one's religion, including (a) to assemble and maintain houses of worship with coreligionists; (b) to establish charitable and humanitarian institutions; (c) to make and use materials needed for rites and customs; (d) to publish religious materials; (e) to teach a religion; (f) to solicit and receive financial contributions; (g) to train and appoint religious leaders; (h) to celebrate holidays and ceremonies; and (i) to communicate with co-religionists around the world.
9. Since 2003, the refusal of consecutive Iraq governments to grant legal recognition to the Evangelical churches as well as affiliation with the *waqf* constitute a violation of the individual and collective rights of Iraqi Evangelicals to manifest their religion, as per article 18 of the ICCPR and article 6 of the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.
- 10. We recommend to the Iraqi government to officially recognize the Evangelical Churches in Iraq, and to grant the Evangelical Churches affiliation with the *Waqf* - Endowment of the Christians, Yezidi, and Sabaeen-Mandaean Religions, in fulfillment of Iraq's obligations under international human rights law.**

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<sup>1</sup> Website of the Endowment of the Christians, Yezidi, and Sabaeen-Mandaean Religions Diwan: <http://cese.iq/>

<sup>2</sup> The seven unrecognized Evangelical denominations that are member of the GSINEC are: Alliance Evangelical Church, New Life Church (Assembly of God), New Testament Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, National Evangelical Baptist Church, Armenian Evangelical Church, and Nazarene Evangelical Church.