

The Iraqi National Elections and Our Moral Obligation

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In the past elections of January 30, 2005, we made a great mistake by not showing up at polling places to vote. There were many reasons in my opinion, including the following:

1. Many people were discouraged because of all the bickering and attacks.
2. Many people have to travel long distances twice, once to register and the second time to vote. Many elderly and economically challenged were unable to do so.
3. Many thought that their vote would not make a difference. We know this is wrong because it was the vote of the 18,000 of Chicago, California, and Arizona that secured us a seat in parliament.
4. Some of us simply still were still unaware of the presence of elections because they are not involved, they live isolated, and do not follow up on what goes on.
5. Some of us simply do not care. What can I say about this group? This is the group of people that breaks my heart. My dearest, if we do not care who will? Why are we here as part of the Diaspora? Is it right that we do not show interest in what goes on in Iraq when we still have people living there? Isn't it our moral obligation to do our part and devote one day every four years to make our voice count? Is driving our family one Saturday to a polling station to vote too much for this nation?

Now, if we were to go to vote, shouldn't we be familiar with who is running, what they stand for, and then decide whom to vote for?

Today, I thought it was important to shed some light on the groups that running, talk about each group in brief so that we would have a general idea before we vote. I would encourage each one of you before voting to sit at home and consider these thoughts. Take each of the participating groups and consider the following:

1. How long have they been struggling for our people.
2. What are their accomplishments?
3. How many members do they really represent?
4. What are their goals and most importantly how are they going to achieve those goals. It is easy to say I will do this and that, the question is how and have I done it in the past?
5. What is the track record of the individuals behind these groups?

Earlier, when Saddam was in power, all oppressed Iraqis groups needed to work together to topple the regime. It was important for Assyrians (ChaldoAssyrians), Kurds, Turkomans, Shi'aa Arabs, etc. to work together because they were facing a common and strong enemy. Today, with the fall of the Ba'ath regime and with freedom and democracy, we must turn to ourselves and prove ourselves independently. During the Ba'athist regime, the ADM needed to be in northern Iraq and cooperating with Kurds because they obviously could not operate in Baghdad freely. On the other hand, the Kurds with the No-Fly-Zone needed to show to the world that they are democratic and open to other ethnic and religious groups and our people had the environment to work with relative freedom. Today, there is no excuse to be under any group, all ethnic and religious groups must feel free to be on their own to conduct their affairs.

Fraud and Rigging

According to the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), the population of Iraq is 27,000,000 and the eligible voters is 14,200,000.¹ This means that the ratio of eligible voters to total Iraqi population is 53% (14,200,000/27,000,000). Any figure around 50% is reasonable, as there is always that under 18 years of age population and those ineligible in every country. According to the CIA country report updated in 2005, 40% of the Iraqi population is between the ages of 0 and 14 years.² If there is another 10% between the ages of 14 and 18, then the eligible voters in Iraq is around 50% (40% plus 10%) indeed.

¹ http://www.ieciraq.org/English/Frameset_english.htm

² <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

This means that it would be impossible for any given province in Iraq to have the number of voters somehow near to the number of total population. Furthermore, a good turnout in any elections around the world is usually considered around 60 to 70 percent of the eligible voters. Considering the security situation in Iraq, 70% is a reasonable turn out, thus 70% of 14,200,000 eligible voters is approximately 10,000,000 voters at the polling stations.

The Elections

There are around 20 coalition slates and 228 lists participating in the elections of December 15, 2005. The candidates will compete over 230 seats from the total 275 seats. The other 45 seats are called "Compensatory Seats," which will be distributed in a very complicated system that might be fair to minorities and women; however, the misconception that all minorities are guaranteed seats from these 45 seats is false. Each minority has the option to compete on its own on a national basis to gain as many seats as possible; however, if it did not cover the National Quota, that group could get a chance to win a seat in the compensatory 45 seats. On the other hand, the Arabs and Kurdish slates will compete within each province separately. There are certain number of seats assigned for each province depending on its population. For example, Baghdad is assigned 59 seats and Nineveh 19 seats. If for example, the 19 seats of Nineveh were not all taken because many lists did not satisfy the governorate quota, then those lists with the largest votes (closest to the governorate quota) will be awarded the remaining seats.

National Quota

The national quota is the number of voters in Iraq nationally divided by the parliament seats available. In this case, and for the Iraqi national elections of December 15, 2005, the national quota is calculated by dividing 10,000,000 by 275, which is equal to roughly 36,400 votes. This means that for every list it has to get a minimum 36,400 votes to win a seat from the 230 seats block.

Governorate Quota

The governorate quota is the number of voters in any given governorate divided by the seats in that governorate. For example, if the voters in Nineveh governorate is 1,000,000 and there are 19 seats to compete over, then each seat will require roughly 52,630 votes (1,000,000 divided by 19).

The 45 Compensatory Seats

Dr. Farid Ayyar, official spokesman for the Independent Electoral Commission in Iraq (IECI) stated that the system of the 45 Compensatory Seats is too complicated. The 45 seats are reserved for lists that participated in the governorate elections but did not succeed to win a seat there. Here, the number of votes that each list received from the various governorates will be tallied together and if that number exceeded the National Quota, the list will win a seat in the Iraqi National Assembly (parliament). After completing this process for all the competing lists and some seats still remained from the original 45, the remaining seats will be given the name of "National Seats." They will be distributed across all lists that have won a seat or more in the governorates races. The votes received by the larger lists on the national level (and not governorate level) will be divided by the number of the left over seats (National Seats) to get a new "Special National Quota." Here, the number of votes received by the larger lists across Iraq will be divided by this new Special National Quota to figure out the number of seats from the National Seats that are won by these lists.³ Additionally, if the final figures indicated that the 230 seats did not include at least 25% women, the larger lists will be obligated to include women in their share of the National Seats from the 45 Compensatory Seats.

The Competing Lists and Candidates

Here are the lists involved with our people running in the elections:

³ <http://nahrain.com/d/news/05/11/07/nhr1107a9.html>

A) List # 752 al-Nahrain Watani (Patriotic Beth Nahrain)

The 12 initial groups of our people that met on October 11, 2005 after the call of the Council of Bishops of Mosul and then met again on October 18, 2005 ended up with five groups plus Mr. Hikmat Hakim.

The al-Nahrain Watani (list # 752) is a coalition from the followings:

1. Bet Nahrain National Union (Gewargis Khoshaba Michael) (700).
 2. Chaldean National Congress (Fo'ad Rahim Bodagh) (680).
 3. Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP) (Nimrod Baito Youkhana) (726).
 4. Suryan (Assyrian) Independent Gathering Movement (Yashoo'a Majid Hadaya) (595).
 5. Chaldean Democratic Forum (Sa'eed Shamaya) (813).
 6. Hikmat Hakim, as Independent (801).
- B) Dr. Shimon Khamo was originally with Bet Nahrain Democratic Party and later Vice President for External Affairs with the Hizb al-Ahrar wa al-Ta'akhi al-'Araqi (Iraqi Liberals and Fraternity Party). Dr. Khamo and ten others in the party had their disagreements with the president of the party, Mr. Hussein al-Mosawi, and the 11 members resigned on October 28, 2005. After deliberations with Mr. Mithal al-Aloosi, the 11 individuals joined Mr. Mithal al-Aloosi and list # 620 (Mithal al-Aloosi List for Iraqi Nation). For all practical purposes, list # 620 is not a list by or from our people.
- C) General Assyrian Congress (800) of Eshaya Eshoo. Eshaya Eshoo was a member of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA). He later split and formed the AUA-Political Arm. He represents himself and few members of his tribe and relatives. He does not have considerable followers. He has accomplished nothing so far for Assyrians.
- D) The Chaldean Democratic United Party (610) of Abd al-Ahad Afram Sawa. Abd al-Ahad Afram has always been a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). He was part of the Kurdistan List in the last elections of January 30 and he is part of the Kurdistan list (730) in this election as well.
- E) The Iraqi Christian Democratic Party (580) of Minas al-Yousifi joined Slate (667) of the National Dialogue of Iraqi Front. Minas al-Yousifi, who lived in Sweden stated in an interview on al-Jazeera Arabic International Satellite TV station on July 1, 2003 that there was no difference between Christians and Moslem, or between Kurds, Chaldeans or Assyrians, etc. He is rejected the leadership of the ADM in Iraq and claims that he is an umbrella for all Christians of Iraq. Some claim that he had allegiances to the Iraqi Communist Party and to the Kurds and Barazani in the past.
- F) Bet Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP) of Romeo Nissan Hakkari withdrew, as they announced officially.⁴
- G) Assyrian Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party that split from BNDP and was supported by AssyriaSat, joined the coalition of the National Salvation Front (Jabhat al-Khalas al-Watani), which includes among others two Pan-Arabist and Nasirite parties.⁵
- H) Christian Brotherhood Democratic Union withdrew from elections.
- I) al-Rafidayn List # 740

The Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) participated in the first meeting of the 12 Christian groups on October 11, 2005, but decided to run on its own because the other groups were asking for demands in the united slate that were impossible to accommodate. The ADM believes that these other groups have no support in Iraq; therefore, their demands should be parallel to their strength. The ADM list is # 740 ... do not confuse it with list 791 of al-Rafidayn Independent Gathering, a different Iraqi coalition.

List # 740 includes 78 (or 79) candidates from the ADM, ChaldoAssyrian Syriac National Council, various civic societies, and independents. The list is headed by Mr. Younadam Kanna and included many notables such as Louis Qlemis, Sarmad Ishaq BiDawid, Dr. Ricardos Yousif, and Prof. Hanaa' Emmanuel al-Qas, attorney Majdi Nabil Khadurri.

⁴ <http://www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=16500.0>

⁵ Read Beth- Nahrain, issue 6, October 2005

The 740 list will compete throughout the 18 Iraqi provinces:

1. In Nineveh, led by former Minister of Migration and Displacement Pascale Eshao Warda, and including Behnam 'Aboosh Abd al-Masih, Duraid Hikmat Tobiya, and Sliwo Masious Sliwo.
2. In Arbil, led by present Minister of Science and Technology Basima Yousif Potrus, and including Nadir Moshe Murad.
3. In Kirkuk, led by former Deputy Governor Sargon Lazar, and including Lu'ai Mikha Elias, Mrs. Dolphin Aprim Gorial, and attorney Ashur Yalda Benyamin.
4. In Dohuk, led by Nisan Mirza, the head of the Assyrian Cultural Center, and including Riyad Girgis Baddi, and Mrs. Fadiya Karim.
5. In Basra, led by George Ishaq, Chief Editor of Bahra.
6. In al-Anbar, led by Mrs. Janet Rasho.

and other governorates as well.

Most of these lists share common program, with little variation in the details. They promise to:

1. Institute ethnic, administrative, political, and cultural rights.
2. Enforce the unity of our Chaldean Assyrian Suryani people.
3. Work for the modification of any articles that contradicted the interests of our people in the permanent Iraqi constitution.
4. Rebuild destroyed villages and bring back the displaced and the harmed, compensate them for their losses, and grant them their citizenship that was revoked.
5. Enforce and develop the Syriac teaching process and the curriculum to go along with the new Iraq based on scientific research.
6. Maintain the unity of Iraqi people and land.
7. Reinforcement of a federal and democratic Iraq.
8. Promote peace, justice, and fraternity between all Iraqi groups.
9. Institute the Universal Declaration of Human Rights principles and the equality among men and women in various fields by enforce the role of women in society.
10. Protect cultural, historical, and archeological wealth of Iraq.
11. Fight corruption and partiality, and promote and work on equal distribution of Iraq's wealth.
12. Rebuild a strong national army to protect Iraq and its sovereignty.

If all groups demand the same things, who is in the best position to succeed? Who is pressing for the issue of unity and empowering our people? Who has been involved from day one in the opposition groups to topple Saddam Hussein? Who was actively working against the Ba'athist regime from within Iraq and not from the comfort of their homes in the West? Whom did the United States government recognize as a legitimate member of the Iraqi Opposition groups? Who did our people in Iraq vote for the most in the previous elections?

The Current Christian Members of Iraqi National Assembly

One final note, one might ask, what is the future of the four Christians in the Kurdistan list who represented the Kurdish list in the current parliament, including the representatives from the APP (Jacklin Zomaya), BNDP (Goriel Mineso Khamis), Chaldean Cultural Club (Nuri Potros 'Atto), and Chaldean Democratic Union Party (Abd al-Ahad Afram). In the past elections, the Sunni Arabs and many other Iraqis did not vote. This meant a bigger share of seats for everybody else, including the Kurds and Shi'aa. The Kurds gained 75 seats unfairly and only because of the Sunni Arab's boycott and other illegal activities to prevent Assyrians, Shabak, Yezidis, and Turkoman from voting. In this election, however, the Sunni Arab will vote. The Sunni Arab population in Iraq is greater than that of the Kurds. Therefore, the 75 seats won by Kurds in the past elections will shrink to around 40 seats only, if not less, if the process is fair. The Kurds could afford giving four seats out of the 75 to their allies from the APP, BNDP, etc. in the past. In this election, however, they cannot do that because they will get around 40 seats only. That is why the APP is joining the Christian list, BNDP is withdrawing, Chaldean Cultural Club is basically ignored. Only Abd

al-Ahad Afram, the devoted member of the KDP, is guaranteed to win a seat and his name is with the top candidates.

Our Moral Obligation

My fellow brothers and sisters,

Do your moral obligation. We must not allow anything to interfere with our organized efforts to vote successfully. Everything else must be put aside; we must not be distracted in the next five weeks.

Our focus must be on the vote of December 15, 2005 in Iraq.

My fellow brothers and sisters,

Vote for the voice of reason that has proven itself through its accomplishments and not talk alone. Vote for those who are supported by our people on the ground in Iraq because they know better. Vote for List # 740, the list that stands for our unity and not separation and for togetherness and not isolation.