

MECHRIC Strongly Condemns the Treatment of Cardinal Louis Sako by Iraqi Government

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, July 24, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The

[Middle East Christian Committee](#)

(MECHRIC) condemns the treatment of Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, by the Iraqi government, whose President, Abdul Latif Rashid, revoked Cardinal Sako's status as Patriarch of the Chaldean Church and the legal caretaker of its endowment on July 14th. Cardinal Sako accused Ryan Al-Kildani, leader of a Christian militia group known as the Babylon Movement, of orchestrating an "unfairly played 'game'" to sideline and intimidate him. He then fled Baghdad and repaired to a monastery in Iraqi Kurdistan. The US State Department issued a statement condemning the harassment of the Cardinal, after which the US Ambassador was summoned to Baghdad for discussion.



Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako (center), Patriarch of the Chaldean Church in Iraq and worldwide, at the press conference, July 21, 2023. Photo: Rudaw

The Babylon Movement is part of a group of militias in Iraq known as the "popular mobilization movement" or PMU. These militias were initially formed to fight ISIS and are dominated by Shi'a groups under the influence of Iran. The State Department had previously sanctioned Mr. Kildani for human rights abuses and Cardinal Sako has been trying to prevent the militia's takeover of the province of Nineveh. Sako has openly accused Kildani of trying to gain control of Church assets and properties and of misappropriating government funds meant for the Chaldean Catholic minority.

"It is unfortunate," Cardinal Sako [wrote](#), "that we in Iraq live in a wide network of self-interest, narrow factionalism and hypocrisy that has produced an unprecedented political, national, and moral chaos."

Though nominally a Christian militia, the Babylon Movement is made up mainly of fighters from

Baghdad's Sadr City, a Shi'a dominated area, and taking a page from Lebanon's Hezbollah, the movement now presents itself as a political party which has won four out of five seats earmarked for the Christian minority. The heads of the Christian churches united to issue a statement distancing themselves from Kildani and his movement on July 4.

"Nothing like this has happened for centuries," said MECHRIC member, Tom Harb. "It is clear that Mr. Kildani of the Babylon Movement has orchestrated a campaign of attacks and harassment against Cardinal Sako and that the Iraqi government has enabled this by removing recognition of his traditional legal status as head of the Chaldean Church. This action has left him no legal recourse to fight the wholesale theft of Church property by the government."

"Now that the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church has fled to Erbil under pressure from Iran-backed militias," said foreign policy expert Dr. Walid Phares, "Cardinal Sako should be called to testify before Congress, the United Nations and the European Parliament as to the conditions for Christians and other minorities in Iraq as Iran slowly tightens its grip on the country. The US Congress has voted in legislation recognizing the vulnerability of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and has called for their special protection several times. The Chaldean Church is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world and deserves special protection from the world community. There should be international calls to reinstate the Patriarch to his traditional role in Baghdad. It is my understanding that the Pope will soon take a stand on behalf of his Cardinal, and it is hoped many more world leaders will come forward."

"Just as Hezbollah controls Christian representation in Lebanon, so too are certain Christians allied with the PMU being elevated in Iraq, and the Christians who stand in their way are being forced out," added MECHRIC member John Hajjar. "The action of the Iraqi Government is not only an affront to Cardinal Sako but to the entire Christian community of Iraq and, indeed, the Middle East. It further marginalizes Christian presence in their ancestral lands. Cardinal Soko deserves the support of the international community. The United Nations needs to put pressure on the Iraqi President to reinstate Sako as the Chaldean Patriarch in Baghdad and to provide him and church property protection. Otherwise, the Christian population of Iraq will continue to decline."

The population of Iraq Christians has already dwindled down to approximately two-hundred and fifty thousand from one and a half million just twenty years ago. In other words, over the last twenty years, four out of every five Iraqi Christians have fled the country. MECHRIC, sadly, does not see that trend changing. Christianity may well become extinct in Iraq over the next few years if something is not done to prevent it.

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