

Press Releases: Readout of USAID Administrator Green and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Samuel Brownback's Trip to Northern Iraq

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

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At the direction of Vice President Mike Pence, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Mark Green and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Samuel Brownback led a U.S. delegation to northern Iraq June 30 – July 3 to visit persecuted ethnic and religious communities who were widely displaced and suffered unspeakable atrocities under the genocidal rule of ISIS. The delegation reaffirmed the unwavering U.S. commitment to those oppressed communities, particularly Christians and Yezidis who were driven to near extinction and are still struggling to survive.

The delegation traveled to Erbil to meet with local archbishops at the residence of Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda of the Chaldean Catholic Church to discuss how the United States can better support Iraqi Christians' recovery from the widespread damage inflicted under ISIS's occupation. They then visited several churches in the region and participated in a roundtable with faith-based non-governmental organizations.

Administrator Green and the delegation also met with Yezidi leaders, including Khurto Hajji Ismail, the current Baba Sheikh, and Yezidi survivors of ISIS captivity to reiterate the Administration's support for this ancient and beleaguered community.

As part of the visit to northern Iraq, the delegation visited several stabilization and humanitarian projects, including U.S.-funded schools and hospitals that are serving vulnerable communities in the Ninawa Plain.

Recognizing that Iraqi leaders must also be part of the solution, the delegation met with government leaders from Baghdad and the Kurdistan

Regional Government (KRG), including Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, to discuss actions being taken by the Government of Iraq to better support these vulnerable populations.

Upon return, Administrator Green briefed Vice President Mike Pence on the trip and on next steps for USAID to streamline aid to these persecuted communities.

Since the Vice President's speech in October 2017, the United States has directed over \$118 million to promote the safe return and reintegration of persecuted ethnic and religious communities to their ancestral homes in Iraq. This funding includes crucial stabilization assistance to restore basic services like water and electricity; emergency shelter and health services; psychosocial services to help victims of sexual and gender-based violence with recovery; and legal assistance to help preserve evidence to prosecute ISIS members for their brutal crimes. The United States is also supporting a long-standing effort to remove improvised explosive devices and other explosive remnants of war to promote the safe return of displaced people in Iraq, including persecuted ethnic and religious communities.

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Douglas Silliman, U.S. Representative Jeff Fortenberry, U.S. Representative Frank Wolf (retired), and senior personnel from the Office of the Vice President were also part of the delegation.

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