We, the people will determine our representation and future!

#StandWithAlqosh

Alqosh demands human rights!

Understanding the KDP's Strategy in Alqosh
A timeline of Lara Yousif Zara's illegal mayorship

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Introduction

Alqosh is an Assyrian village in Nineveh Governorate; it is not part of the Kurdistan Region. The majority of its inhabitants are Chaldean Catholics. Its status remains disputed between Baghdad and the KRG. As Baghdad has exerted little effort to press its own claim, the fact that Alqosh remains disputed—amid years of KDP political and security occupation—is due to the local Assyrian residents, the majority of whom do not favor incorporation into the KRI and who have resisted KDP attempts at de facto annexation. The KDP does not have a natural base in Alqosh or in other Assyrian towns of the Nineveh Plain; it buys constituencies through financial patronage.

The Alqosh mayorship has been a recent site of an ongoing effort to silence Alqosh’s people, eliminate their legally and democratically selected leadership, and install a co-opted leadership that will facilitate the KRG appropriation of the Alqosh area.

Lara Yousif Zara, a KDP member, was not elected by her community nor was she appointed by a council that represents her community. In fact, her installment by an external entity represents the undermining of fragile democratic processes that should be protected by Western government committed to advancing democratic norms in Iraq.

It is disheartening to Christian Assyrians and other Iraqi minorities when this sabotage of embryonic democratic norms is validated by U.S. officials. Please read the following timeline to understand what has actually transpired in Alqosh.

“In July [of 2017], Christian civil society organizations reported the Assyrian Christian mayors of Al Qosh and Tel Kayf were replaced, reportedly due to corruption, with KDP members who were also Christian. At the direction of the [new] mayor, [Kurdish] security forces in Alqosh arrested and threatened a group who publicly protested this decision. Christian groups stated this was part of a ‘Kurdization’ of their towns.”

July 16, 2017

Ahead of the 2017 Kurdish referendum, the longtime Mayor of Alqosh Sub-District in Nineveh Governorate, Faeiz Abed Jahwareh, was deposed by the orders of the KDP-majority Nineveh Provincial Council on baseless charges of corruption. An interim mayor was appointed in his place. Days later, Jahwareh filed an appeal with the Iraqi Administrative Court of Justice in Baghdad. The Nineveh Provincial Council is comprised of 41 members, 31 of whom are part of the Kurdish bloc.

July 20, 2017

Hundreds of Alqosh residents demonstrated against the removal of Jahwareh, demanding that their free political will and rights be respected. Protestors carried Iraqi flags and held signs with demands such as, “We the people will determine our representation and future!” and “Alqosh demands human rights!” A protest statement signed by thousands of members of the community was delivered to the Alqosh Sub-District Council.

July 31, 2017

Lara Yousif Zara, an Alqosh resident and member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), was appointed by the Alqosh Sub-District Council to replace Jahwareh as mayor. Four members of the six-member sub-district council that installed Lara Yousif Zara were affiliated with the KDP.
August 2, 2017

Hundreds of Alqosh residents held a second demonstration to protest the removal of the town’s mayor and the unilateral installment of Lara Yousif Zara without the local residents being allowed to hold an election to choose their local council leadership, as well as the KDP’s stated intention to conduct its independence referendum in the Nineveh Plain.

August 18, 2017

Portraits of former KRG President Masoud Barzani and signs reading “Yes to Referendum” were installed throughout the town of Alqosh just hours before the third demonstration planned by Alqosh residents. Hundreds took to the streets once more to protest what they believed was an infringement on their rights by the KDP. The portraits were defaced in protest days later by local residents.

August 24, 2017

Alqosh police delivered individual notices to eleven local residents identified as the “ring leaders” of the Alqosh protests. The notices warned the recipients against future “illegal” protests and threatened consequences. The notices were stamped by the town’s newly-appointed mayor, Lara Yousif Zara. Several recipients received death threats from KDP members, including from Lara Yousif Zara’s husband Duraid Jameel Tezi. There were no further protests after this date.
September 25, 2017

The Kurdish referendum vote was held in Alqosh, despite the fact that the Nineveh Plain is federal territory. The vote was not held in other Nineveh Plain towns. Alqosh residents boycotted the vote in overwhelming numbers. After voting, Lara Yousif Zara was filmed wielding a large firearm and shooting into the air to celebrate the referendum.

October 30, 2017

On October 30, 2017, the Iraqi Administrative Court in Baghdad ruled that Jahwareh’s removal from office was unlawful, dismissed all charges, and ordered his reinstatement as Mayor of Alqosh Sub-District. Locals held a public gathering to celebrate the court’s decision. Jahwareh was subsequently detained by KDP intelligence forces and held for several hours, during which time his family was threatened and he was warned against continuing his efforts to reassume office. Lara Yousif Zara later filed an appeal against the October 2017 decision.

March 28, 2018

The Iraqi Administrative Court of Justice ratified its October 2017 decision to reinstate Jahwareh as Mayor of Alqosh on March 28, 2018, following an unsuccessful appeal from Lara Yousif Zara, but he was prevented from returning.
May 16, 2018

In May 2018, the Governor of Nineveh issued a formal notice to Lara Yousif Zara, ordering her to turnover duties and responsibilities to Jahwareh. She refused to comply with the order and retained the office through the threat of violence.

July 10, 2018

In July 2018, the Governor of Nineveh issued a second notice to Lara Yousif Zara, ordering her to vacate the office and permit Jahwareh’s return. Again, she refused to comply with the order.

July 15, 2018

Jahwareh attempted to return to office, but was arbitrarily detained by KDP intelligence forces and taken to an unknown location where he was assaulted and threats were made against his life. He was explicitly told not to attempt to return to office.

July 29, 2018

Then-head of the Nineveh Provincial Council, Bashar al-Kiki (KDP), wrote to the Governor of Nineveh asking that Jahwareh be removed from office for “failing to report for duty” despite the fact that Jahwareh was detained and assaulted when he attempted to return to work for the first time in over a year on July 15, 2018.
September 13, 2018

The Governor of Nineveh issued a decree relieving Jahwareh from his duties as mayor for failing to report for office, despite the fact that the KDP was actively preventing his return.

October 8, 2018

The Alqosh Sub-District Council reappointed Lara Yousif Zara as Mayor of Alqosh. She continues to occupy the position and is frequently presented by the KRG as a symbol of ethno-religious co-existence and validation of their project to annex the Nineveh Plain.