Plight of Iraqi Christians Worsens

The exodus of Iraqi Christians, which has been underway since the U.S. invasion in 2003, continues unabated, and may even be accelerating. As reported previously by The New American, the massacre that took place at a Baghdad Church on October 31 of this year has heightened the sense within the Christian community that the Iraqi government will not take the steps necessary to defend them from the terrorism of the Jihadists.

According to a report in the *New York Times*, the Christian emigration is taking on the appearance of full-scale flight. As Steven Lee Myers wrote for the *Times*:

> Those who fled the latest violence — many of them in a panicked rush, with only the possessions they could pack in cars — warned that the new violence presages the demise of the faith in Iraq. Several evoked the mass departure of Iraq's Jews after the founding of the state of Israel in 1948.

"It's exactly what happened to the Jews," said Nassir Sharhoom, 47, who fled last month to the Kurdish capital, Erbil, with his family from Dora, a once mixed neighborhood in Baghdad. "They want us all to go."

For the past two years, the Obama administration has desperately endeavored to present Islam as a religion of peace. In June 2009, Obama went so far as to declare that the United States is "one of the largest Muslim countries in the world" and at a Ramadan iftar dinner at the White House later that year, he proclaimed that "The contribution of Muslims to the United States are too long to catalog because Muslims are so interwoven into the fabric of our communities and our country" — comments that are patently at odds with reality.

Actually, for Christians in Iraq, Egypt, Indonesia, and other nations where the faithful live under the oft-present threat of open persecution by Islam, such comments from the White House may well be received as almost a mockery of their plight — regardless of President Obama's intentions. After all, persecuted Christians could ask why the President of the most powerful nation in the world — a nation that is, according to the self-identification of an overwhelming majority of its citizens, a "Christian" nation — would identify that nation with the very forces that are now driving them from their ancestral homes in the wake of a U.S.-led coalition's invasion and protracted occupation of their country?

According to the most recent report in the *Times*, the Christian population of Iraq has been devastated by emigration:

> The Christians and other smaller minority groups here, however, have been explicitly made targets and have emigrated in disproportionate numbers. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, these groups account for 20 percent of the Iraqis who have gone abroad, while they were only 3 percent of the country's prewar population.

New American

Written by **James Heiser** on December 14, 2010

More than half of Iraq's Christian community, estimated to number 800,000 to 1.4 million before the American-led invasion in 2003, have already left the country.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an iteration of the insurgent group Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, claimed responsibility for the suicidal siege and said its fighters would kill Christians "wherever they can reach them."

What followed last month were dozens of shootings and bombings in Baghdad and Mosul, the two cities outside of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq. At least a dozen more Christians died, eight of them in Mosul.

As Rev. Elijah Abraham, a Christian minister who was raised as a Muslim in Iraq, told *The New American* in a recent interview, growing up an adherent of Islam meant living with a profound hatred of those who were not Muslims:

> I grew up with hatred: hatred toward Christianity. I had a lot of Christian neighbors and friends and I loved them, but the Christians I could not separate from Christianity because my community and Islam told me I could not separate America from Christianity … England from Christianity … colonialism from Christianity. So that was the hatred — hatred toward the West — imperialism, capitalism, etc. — and hatred toward the Jews, and Israel, and Zionism. Nobody told me why I needed to hate. The culture of hate is just a way of life, and not just hatred toward Christians and Jews, but also toward other factions within Islam. There is no peace. There is this constant struggle, on a personal, community, or national level.

Now those hatreds have boiled to the surface, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians are paying the price. The 2010 Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom summarized the horrific conditions in Iraq in its official findings as follows:

> Systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations continue in Iraq. Members of the country's smallest religious minorities still suffer from targeted violence, threats, and intimidation, against which they receive insufficient government protection. Perpetrators of such attacks are rarely identified, investigated, or punished, creating a climate of impunity. The small communities also experience a pattern of official discrimination, marginalization, and neglect. In addition, there continue to be sectarian attacks, often with impunity, and tense relations between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis, and other egregious, religiously-motivated violence also continues.

> Based on these concerns, USCIRF again recommends in 2010 that Iraq be designated as a "country of particular concern," or CPC.

The members of the USCIRF are appointed by the President and bipartisan leadership from the Senate and House of Representatives. It remains to be seen whether the findings of the commission will have any discernible influence on the outlook of the elites in Washington, D.C.

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