Light in the Darkness

Help and hope for those escaping extremism in Iraq and across the Middle East



credit: Carole Al Farah

Keeping hope alight in a troubled region

Emmanuel* carries his three-year-old daughter in his arms: "What has she done to deserve this?", he asks. "Why should we leave our homes and live like this?"

The young Christian and his family are among vast numbers of people who fled as Islamic State attacked ancient towns and villages in northern Iraq.

Aid to the Church in Need staff met Emmanuel and his family during an emergency fact-finding trip to Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish north.

This report describes how – thanks to your charity – ACN is offering urgent help: food, shelter and medicine.

ACN is providing support to people traumatised by extremists who told them: convert or die.

Your compassion – given to a faithful people forced from their ancient Biblical homelands – is a sure sign that Christ's light still shines amid darkness and despair.

The suffering in Iraq, Syria and beyond inflicted on Yizidis and moderate Muslims as well as Christians shows that the struggle for religious liberty is a defining issue of our times.

Pope Francis has described religious freedom as "a fundamental right of man, reflecting his highest dignity".

The call to stand up for faith and freedom is for many the difference between liberty and incarceration, life and death.

> "There is still hope for the Christians in Iraq but only if we act now."

Thanking ACN for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with his suffering people, Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako of Baghdad urged us to continue in acts of prayer and self-sacrifice.

He stated: "There is still hope for the Christians in Iraq but only if we act now."

(*His name has been changed for security reasons.)

Helping the suffering Church today

Aid to the Church in Need



A displaced Iraqi Christian woman holds a picture of her son who was killed by extremists

Love and grief

Her eyes full of sorrow, a mother reaches into a pocket and pulls out a photograph of her son, Salman.

The 43-year-old had been shot through the head three times in Mosul.

His mother and her other son – standing alongside her – had taken refuge in a nearby village close to the ancient monastery of Mar Matti (St Matthew).

But when the village was overrun by Islamic State forces, they fled a second time to Kurdish northern Iraq where ACN is providing emergency help.

As they grieve a much-loved son and brother, they reflect on reports that for the first time in 1,600 years, there is no Sunday Mass in Mosul.

And all because the last remaining Christians were forced out.

One father, Raeed, told how he, his wife and three young children were told they could not leave the city unless they handed over everything – mobile phones, watches, camera, cash.

The gunmen even demanded Raeed hand over the battery of his six-year-old son's hearing aid.

raq spossessed

Following the collapse of the city's infrastructure, food and water are scarce – and infestations of rats, snakes and other vermin have made matters worse.

Sister Annie said: **"If we want the Christians to remain in the Middle East, then we must help them with what they need in order to survive."**



Islamic State – destroying freedom by force

"This country is drenched with blood... I cannot go on living here", the man lamented.

The man and his wife had lost their son, David. He was killed by a bomb when Islamic State seized Qaraqosh – the last Christian majority city in Iraq.

His family has no passports, but they keep repeating that they want to leave Iraq.

As Islamic State attempts to establish a caliphate across the Middle East, it has taken control of a swathe of Iraq and Syria and has made incursions into Lebanon.

Islamic State is inspired by the extremist Wahhabi school of Sunni Islam, which does not tolerate the presence of other faiths – expelling Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities from the areas they have seized.

Vatican II teaches: "It is a violation of the will of God… when force is brought to bear in any way in order to destroy or repress religion."

Please pray for an end to oppression so that people may live out their faith in freedom.



A young mother mourns the loss of her son, David



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