

IRAQ

Christians slowly returned to their towns and villages on the Nineveh Plains following Daesh (ISIS)’s attempt to eliminate Christianity. During an October 2018 visit to the UK organized by ACN, Chaldean Archbishop Habib Nafari said Iraq’s Christians had endured systematic violence designed to eradicate them: “If this is not genocide, then what is genocide?”¹ His sentiments were echoed by Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako.² As of June 2019, just over 46 percent of families who fled had returned – but Churches lamented an apparent lack of both domestic and international aid to rebuild. Father Salar Kajo, of the Churches’ Nineveh Reconstruction Committee, said: “After a year of rebuilding, the only channel of aid has been through the Church,” adding that the Hungarian government provided direct aid.³ The process of return has been complicated by security problems, with accusations of aggression, including land grabs by militias allegedly protecting Christian settlements.⁴ Widespread problems confront the country’s Christian communities, including additional taxes levied on Christian-majority areas in the Kurdish autonomous region,⁵ lack of support for those who suffered sexual violence,⁶ accounts of at least 350 Christian-owned properties being illegally seized,⁷ and the sporadic killings of Christians and members of other minorities.⁸



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DECEMBER 2017

MP Joseph Silewa complained of Christians in Qaraqosh and Bartella being harassed – and in some cases sexually assaulted – by members of the Shabak-Shi’a Popular Mobilization Forces’ (PMF) 30th Brigade. The Kurdistan Regional Government’s Director General of Christian Affairs confirmed that there had been harassment and abuse by the PMF and other militia groups following the liberation of the Nineveh Plains from Daesh.⁹

MARCH 2018

Dr. Hisham Shafiq was stabbed to death along with his wife and elderly mother in their home in Baghdad. Father Biyos Qasha feared these events were part a plan to force Christians from their homes.¹⁰

JANUARY 2019

The Ministry of Education’s new curriculum was condemned by Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako. He said: “I read inaccurate, inappropriate and offensive statements that incite hatred and division, which are far from the values of tolerance and the principles of citizenship and coexistence.” For example, the textbooks for children aged 6-11 say unveiled women are “sick.”¹¹

APRIL 2019

A gun attack on a Palm Sunday procession in Bartella forced Christians to abandon the traditional ceremonial start to Holy Week. Cars drove alongside the procession while those inside opened fire. Fewer than a third of 3,800 Christian families that left Bartella have returned, and the Shabak-Shi’a militias, which control the town’s security, have reportedly harassed Christians, including firing guns in front of St George’s Church for more than an hour and threatening its priest, Father Behnam Benoka.¹²