

Forces Rally to Defend Christian Town From Islamic State

Efforts are being rallied to save one of the last remaining centers of indigenous Christian presence in the Levant against a renewed jihadi attack.

Militants of the theologically based "Islamic State" have come within 3 kilometers of the Syriac Orthodox town of Sadad in western Syria, the Assyrian International News Agency reported Thursday, Nov 12.

"We are afraid that ISIS will conquer the town, which God will hopefully prevent. We would lose the center of Christianity in our diocese," the Syrian Orthodox archbishop of Homs, Selwanos Boutros Alnemeh, told the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need earlier in the week.

Faced with the prospect of another irreplaceable loss, different anti-Islamist factions have teamed up to defend the town, albeit for different reasons.

Sadad's strategic location, 60 kilometers southeast of Syrian government-held Homs but close to the Damascus-Homs main highway, makes the town a prize for both IS to win and Assad to keep.

Sadad is one town where remnants of the language of Christ is still spoken. The Bible is said to refer to it as *Zedad*, or mountainside, in both the books of Numbers and Ezekiel.

The town has been under siege by IS for well over a week, Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, head of the Syriac Orthodox Church, earlier told *Newsweek*.

He added that more than 500 Christian fighters, joined by pro-

government fighters, have travelled from across Syria to prevent the town's fall.

IS launched an offensive against Syria's ancient Assyrian Christian heartlands on 31 Oct. as it continues its push west towards Damascus.

In a surprise attack three weeks ago, IS took the town of Mahin, 10 kilometers east of Sadad, from government forces and ultimately advanced to a mountain about 3 kilometers southeast of Sadad itself, AINA said.

Since August, thousands of civilians have been displaced by a combination of IS advances and increased aerial and ground bombardment by Russian and Syrian government forces trying to stave off the militants, the Syrian Network for Human Rights reported.

Out of 15,000 original residents, only hundreds are left in the town, understood to be mainly defenders.

Most of those who fled Sadad travelled to towns with sizeable Christian populations, such as Fairouzeh and Zaidal east of Homs city.

Paying to Avoid Death

In October 2013, Sadad was briefly taken by Islamic fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra. Before being forced to leave, the jihadis killed at least 45 Christians, pillaging churches and houses.

Recalling the unexpected attack two years ago, Archbishop Boutros Alnemeah told *World Watch Monitor*: "Not so many people managed to escape. The town was taken at night while the inhabitants were asleep."

"Among those martyred were a family of six. They (the militants) dragged them from their home. They were taken to a nearby well, where they pushed their heads down the mouth of

it. They shot them one by one to the head and let their bodies fall to the bottom," Alnemeh said.

The victims included an elderly father and mother, in their 80s and 90s, a daughter, her two children and her mother-in-law.

"The jihadists want to capture Sadad because it is a Christian town," the Archbishop's assistant, Rev. Luka Awad, said.

"When IS militants invaded Qaryatain, they threatened they would kill all the Christians in Sadad," he was quoted as saying by Middle East Christian News.

Qaryatain, another Syrian town with a large Syriac Christian population in Homs province, fell to IS in August. Hundreds of Christians, both Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic, were taken captive. They were later released after being forced to pay jizya (Islamic protection money) and sign a dhimma (Sharia restrictive contract) to avoid death.

"The people of Sadad began to leave after IS took al-Qaryatain," Osama Edward, a member of the Assyrian Human Rights Network told Syria Direct, a news project comprising Syrian and Western reporters.

Later in the month, the IS bulldozed the historic fifth-century Syriac monastery of Mor (St.) Eliane the Hermit.

Earlier this year, on Feb. 23, jihadis drove out 3,000 Assyrian Christians from their homes when they overran 35 of their villages on the Khabour River in Hassaka, at the opposite end of the country in north-eastern Syria.

An estimated 168 Christians are still captives of the IS, after the jihadis, on camera, shot three dead and threatened to kill more if demands for a hefty ransom were not met.

The Last Stronghold in Iraq

Further east, across the border in Iraq, IS militants drove into the Nineveh Plains in August 2014, north and east of Iraq's second largest city of Mosul, sending 200,000 indigenous Assyrians on the run.

The date was Aug. 7.

"Aug. 7 is Assyrian Martyrs' Day. It is commemorated worldwide by Assyrians to remember their fallen, including the 3,000 who were killed by the Iraqi army in Iraq between Aug. 7 and 11, 1933," said Peter BetBasoo, founder of the Assyrian International News Agency.

The Nineveh Plains were the last stronghold of Assyrians in Iraq.

Having escaped 1,400 years of persecution "by Muslims, Arabs, Turks, Kurds and Iranians, the events of the past year have caused a fundamental psychological transformation of most of the Assyrian population," BetBasso said.

"The low-grade genocide since 2004 and the wanton destruction by ISIS in the last year in Iraq and Syria have caused most Assyrians to see the writing on the wall, and to acknowledge, consciously and subconsciously, that it is time to leave their birth land."

The jihadis, including IS militants, have invariably left a trail of destruction behind them, including destroyed ancient churches, monasteries and shattered native communities.

It is this "wanton" treatment of Christian minorities elsewhere in the Middle East that is motivating Christian fighters to prevent another tragedy in Sadad, said Nuri Kino, founder of the Middle Eastern advocacy group A Demand for Action.

"We hope that Sadad does not become a new Mosul, Nineveh, Khabour or al-Qaryatain," Kino told *Newsweek*. "The people in

Sadad and all those that joined them, many Christians from all over Syria, showed that they have had it with ISIS turning Christians into slaves.”

(Note: Kino has been a contributor to *World Watch Monitor*).

Sadad is a center of heritage for Syria’s Christian minority, which made up approximately 10 percent of the country’s pre-war population. It is home to several churches, including the Syriac Orthodox Church of St. Theodore and the Church of Mar Sarkis, which holds a number of rare 18th-century Christian wall paintings.

The Syriac Orthodox Church traditionally has had between 1.5 million and 2 million followers spread throughout Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and southern Turkey. Yet, like other native Middle Eastern communities, more are increasingly living in a Western diaspora than remaining in their now-hostile cradle lands.

This year marks a century since what has become known among Assyrians/Syriacs as the *Sayf*, or Sword—the mass killings of their populations by Ottomans during World War I—in conjunction with the Armenian and Greek genocides.

Speaking of Sadad, Rev. Awad said, “It is in every sense a center of Christian heritage whose loss is unthinkable!”

“We plead with the international community to put an end to this war. Our people have been the victim of a genocide 100 years ago in 1915,” he said. “We do not need another genocide in the 21st century.”

Advocates Plead With Governors Over Syrian Refugees

The heads of several U.S. refugee advocacy and resettlement agencies on Tuesday called on the nation's governors to back down from efforts to close their states to new refugees from Syria in the wake of Friday's deadly Paris attack.

The calls came in the wake of statements of varying intensity by the mostly Republican governors of 25 states who say they are worried about people resettling in their states after fleeing Syria's four-year civil war. The governors cited concerns that some refugees could be associated with Islamic State militants.

"If ISIS had hoped that their attacks in Paris would provoke the United States and its allies to react with small-minded panic, some governors are helping them get their wish," said Linda Hartke, president of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, one of nine agencies contracted by the U.S. State Department to resettle refugees.

"This is not an either/or situation," Hartke said on a conference call with reporters and the heads of three other refugee advocacy groups. "The United States can continue to welcome refugees while continuing to ensure our own security."

Lavinia Limon, chief executive of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, noted that most refugees, which are referred to the United States by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, undergo about two years of security and background checks before they are allowed to enter the United States and that none have committed terrorist attacks.

“The millions of tourists and businessmen that come in every year do not undergo even remotely the level of checks that refugees do,” Limon said.

Governors over a wide swath of the United States, from Idaho to Florida, said they were not confident that existing programs to screen potential refugees would exclude those who might carry out attacks. A Syrian passport found near the site of one of the Paris attacks indicated that its holder had entered the European Union through Greece, raising concerns that an attacker had entered with a crowd of refugees.

Kevin Appleby, director of migration policy for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said an estimated 4 million people have fled the fighting in Syria, with the United States having taken in about 2,200.

“We haven’t even come close to the burden-sharing that we need to be at,” Appleby said. “We call upon all the governors, all our officials in Congress to come together and look at real solutions to this crisis and not to politicize it.” {eoa}

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When a Muslim Shot His Daughter, This Man Could Have Responded in Hate

Ray was taking his 10-year-old daughter, Hannah, to the beach in a West African country.

It was about a month after Sept. 11, 2001, and Ray said the travel restrictions for Americans had been lifted in the

country where he was serving as a humanitarian worker for a worldwide nonprofit.

Ray was driving; Hannah was in her new swimsuit. A Muslim man approached the car from the sand dunes and greeted Ray with a formality.

Then—the unthinkable.

The man held the gun to Ray's temple and fired multiple blanks. When the bullet finally left the barrel, it went through Ray's arm into Hannah's chest.

Fourteen years have now passed, and Ray and Hannah are both amiable to talking about the ordeal, with one caveat for the Muslim people they worked with: "Please don't associate (them) with the radical fringe."

In light of the Paris terrorist attacks and the rise of the Islamic State, it's a message the father and daughter are desperate to get to the church—that the everyday Muslims are not our enemies.

For Hannah, the bullet that could have killed her never reflected a religion: "When I was curled up in fetal position bleeding, I asked my dad if that's a terrorist, and he said yes, so I thought, '*OK, he's a terrorist.*'"

"In terms of today, if it affects my view of Muslims, no, because after the shooting, once we eventually returned, fellow Muslims were my friends in school and outside school. They were so loving, and thanked me for coming back to give the country a second chance. It was a key part of restoration and healing."

For Ray, the incident that could have scarred his family was motivation to continue outreach to a hurting, marginalized group.

"Muslims more than ever before are suffering," Ray says. "More

than ever before in their history, they're vulnerable. Muslim people live in the poorest parts in the world today where there's a lot of injustice. Injustice and nonstop hopelessness can breed radical acts."

To fight the growth of ISIS and assist the American church in reaching out to Muslims, Ray offers three specific points, especially as many in the church are worried terrorists could be infiltrating the U.S. by way of refugee status.

First, the American church needs to learn about Muslims, which are one of the most unreached people groups on the planet. If we want to share Jesus with them, we must understand their stories.

Second, the church needs to look at the Muslim world with the compassion and love of Jesus rather than the disdain many seem to promote after radical Islamic attacks.

Third, do not allow the media to redefine Christian tenets such as faith with fear.

Ray says he believes that if Jesus were walking the earth today, the parable of the Good Samaritan would be retitled "The Good Muslim," and the Samaritan woman at the well would be a Muslim.

"In our view of the world, we cannot let radical acts allow us to be motivated by fear of the unknown or cause us to redefine our position," Ray says. "We have to remember Jesus equipped us with love."

For Hannah, who is now in her mid-20s, this radical love allowed her to face her shooter in prison and offer forgiveness.

In fact, it was this act of violence that has reinforced her faith for the last few decades. Admittedly, the reality of the shooting didn't impact her until she was an adult, but now,

it's a driving force for how she lives her life.

"There is no way to deny the amazing truth of my story," Hannah says. "It's kept my faith very strong and has been the foundation of my faith growing up."

The young woman begs the American church to go outside of themselves to reach out to hurting people, especially in light of the recent violence. But to do that, first, we must understand the radical love Christ first gave us.

"Allow yourself to be loved, so He can help you love other people," she says.

And for Ray, it's the modern-day civil rights battle, giving the church a chance to bring revival to those who are suffering.

"I think we have opportunities more than ever before in history to deeply touch Muslims with compassionate love," Ray says. "If anything, the church should be leading the march against injustices, against suffering. ... Is the church going to miss out on another opportunity to take the lead with compassionate love, to reach out to people who are really suffering, really need our care? I carry a heartache for the church, for us to engage the world holistically as very clearly Jesus lived out and commanded us to do."

Where Are All the Christian Refugees From Syria?

Christians and other religious minorities in Syria have been targeted for death, sexual slavery, displacement, cultural

eradication and forced conversion by ISIS.

Many of these persecuted Christians hope to escape to the United States. They have been largely excluded, with the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration admitting to officials at The Barnabas Fund, a Christian relief agency, "There is no way that Christians will be supported because of their religious affiliation."

According to data from the State Department's Refugee Processing Center for Fiscal Year 2015, resettled Syrian refugees were 97 percent Muslim. The Hudson Institute's Nina Shea, in a November 2 article in National Review, showed that in the past five years 53 out of 2,003 Syrian refugees accepted by the United States have been Christians (about 2.5 percent of the total). But about 10 percent of Syrians are Christians.

IRD Religious Liberty Director Faith McDonnell commented:

"The U.S. government's response has been woefully inadequate—neither helping these minorities defend themselves and stay, nor providing them asylum to leave.

"Christians cannot go to refugee camps because there they face the same persecution and terror from which they fled. If they are not in the refugee camps, they are not included in the application process for asylum. The State Department knows this, but continues to allow the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to select refugees for asylum with no regard to the endangered religious minorities.

"The blame is not just with the U.N. and the administration. U.S. organizations who resettle refugees are also to blame. This includes Christian groups that resist any focus on Christian victims of ISIS, and oppose actions by Congress to welcome not just economic migrants but also Christians and other religious minorities victimized by ISIS.

“Other religious minorities—such as Jews, Yazidis, Mandaeans, Shia Shabaks and Turkmen—are also being targeted, and largely left out of refugee resettlement. Shea notes that only one Yazidi was resettled in the U.S. in the past five years of Syria’s civil war, even though thousands of Yazidi girls are taken as sex slaves by ISIS.”

McDonnell’s full article can be found on *The Stream*.

The Dead Sea Scrolls: God’s Supernatural Timing

Many people know about the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, very few understand the supernatural timing of this event.

“Contrary to what many rabbis claim today, first-century Judaism expected the Messiah to suffer for the nation. Let’s speed up 2,000 years. The story gets even better.”

Watch part two of this video and you may be amazed at the Lord’s timing. [Click here](#) for part one of the story. {eoa}

Ron Cantor is the director of *Messiah’s Mandate International* in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of *Tiferet Yeshua*, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book is *Identity Theft*. Follow him at [@RonSCantor](#) on Twitter.

Reports: Terrorists Stormed Le Bataclan to the Tune of 'Kiss the Devil'

Shots were fired in Le Bataclan as the California band played their song "Kiss the Devil," according to reports.

The brutal attack, which was one of several that devastated the French capital, is considered to be the worst in rock history, *Rolling Stone* reports.

The terrorists stormed in with AK-47-type guns, one survivor says, while Eagles of Death manipulated their guitar strings to the lyrics:

"Who'll love the Devil?

"Who'll sing his song?

"I will love the Devil and his song."

"(The terrorists) were very calm, very methodical, very slow. I watched the guy reloading. The person knew what he was doing. He wasn't panicking," one survivor said. "This was practiced. They weren't in there shooting like in an American movie. At no point did they put the guns on full automatic. It was only semi-automatic with pauses between the shots."

BREAKING: Panic Strikes German Soccer Stadium Amid Bomb Truck Finding

A friendly soccer game between hosts Germany and Netherlands in Hanover was called off less than two hours before its start on Tuesday for fear of a bomb attack, German police said.

Hanover Police President Volker Kluwe told state broadcaster ARD that authorities had taken seriously indications of a planned attack with explosives. He did not elaborate.

“The visitors (spectators), who were already in the stadium at that time, were asked to leave the stadium without panicking,” police said in a brief statement.

After Friday’s attacks in Paris, security measures in Hanover had been tight. German Chancellor Angela Merkel was set to attend with Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel and government ministers, in a show of solidarity with France.

“We were re-routed on our way to the stadium and are now in a safe area,” German team spokesman Jens Grittner said on Twitter. “We cannot say more at this moment.”

Two Dutch government ministers attending the match—Defense Minister Jeanine Hennes and Health and Sport Minister Edith Schippers—were returning home.

The world champions had not initially wanted the game to go ahead after having played against France in Paris on Friday as a wave of attacks hit the city, killing 129 people.

The contingent of 80 Germans, including players, coaches and staff, then spent the night holed up in the changing rooms of the Stade de France stadium as the attacks took place across

the capital, before heading for the airport on Saturday morning.

But the players, coaches as well as the national football association then decided to go ahead with the game to show unity. {eoa}

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Indiana Pastor Speaks Out After Pregnant Wife's Brutal Slaying

Pastor's wife Amanda Blackburn was brutally murdered after a home invasion earlier this month. Now, her husband, Davey, is speaking out about what he wants the world to know about his wife.

"She loved Jesus with her whole heart," Davey tells *Good Morning America*. "And she loved people and spent her life pouring her life out to people."

As for the break-in and her death, Davey tells the morning show: "It's really hard to sort through all of the emotions of what we're feeling about all this. We're confused. We don't understand why. We're angry. We're not really sure what to do."

[Click here to watch the video to see more.](#)

Obama Remains Steadfast in Defense of Muslim Faith

Republican and Democratic governors are thwarting President Obama's plan to move thousands of Syrian refugees into your neighborhood.

It is a prudent measure to take—especially in the aftermath of the Islamic terrorist attack in Paris. And it is especially prudent now that ISIS has warned that America will be next.

“We need to take ISIS at their word,” Franklin Graham wrote on Facebook. “Their goal is world domination. They want to control us—they want to destroy us.”

However, President Obama and the Council for American Islamic Relations called the moratorium on Syrian refugees un-American.

“That's shameful,” the president said, referring to suggestions that only Syrian Christians be allowed to enter the United States. “That's not American. That's not who we are. We don't have religious tests to our compassion.”

CAIR went on to say that such actions were “driven by fear and Islamophobia.”

Well, if wanting to keep the radical Islamists out of our nation makes me an extremist—then so be it.

Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee delivered the harshest critique of President Obama's response to the Paris terrorist attacks—calling it wimpish.

“We have a Cub Scout for commander in chief,” he said.

“It’s embarrassing when a left-wing socialist French President shows strength and determination to eradicate animals who are slaughtering innocent civilians while our president lectures us on the moral necessity to open our borders to tens of thousands of un-vetted people from the Middle East.

But President Obama remains steadfast in his defense of the Muslim faith. He said the world has a terrorist problem—not a Muslim problem.

“The overwhelming majority of victims of terrorism over the last several years, and certainly the overwhelming majority of victims of ISIL, are themselves Muslims,” he said. “ISIL does not represent Islam. It is not representative in any way of the attitudes of the overwhelming majority of Muslims.”

I really want to believe that Islam is the religion of peace. I really do. But it’s hard to do when there is not overwhelming condemnation of the terrorist attacks from the majority of Muslims.

Where are the voices of the Muslims outraged that their faith has been hijacked? Where are the thousands of Muslims marching in the streets denouncing the terrorists? Where are they? Why have they chosen to remain silent?

I’m all for welcoming the huddled masses yearning to be free. It’s the ones yearning to wage jihad that I’m worried about.

What’s going to happen when one of those Syrian refugees opens fire in a Chick-fil-A or launches a chemical attack at Disney World or explodes a pressure cooker at Cafe DuMonde in the French Quarter?

We are not Islamophobic, Mr. President. We are not un-American. We just don’t want our kids to get blown up.

Why Japanese Churches Are Praying for a Move of God This Weekend

Technically, its name is the Nippon Budokan, but in Tokyo it's simply the Budokan.

This octagonal arena opened in 1964 as a Judo and Martial Arts venue, but has turned into one of the most important and famous venues in Japan with Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton and The Beatles all having performed there.

"It's like Madison Square Garden to New York City," said Chad Hammond, director of Asian Affairs for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). "It's a landmark in Tokyo. To be able to say you sang or performed at the Budokan is a big thing."

Japanese Christians are praying for big things at the Budokan this weekend, where the Celebration of Love will feature a gospel message from Franklin Graham, who has preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to more than 4 million people around the world, including four times in Japan (Okinawa 2006, Osaka 2010, Sendai 2012, Sapporo 2014).

In fact, the online ticketing response for this weekend's Celebration has been so robust, a fourth event was added to accommodate the crowd. The Budokan was already set to host events on Friday, Saturday and Sunday night (Nov. 20-22), but an additional Saturday morning outreach has been added.

It's quite a positive development for the churches in Japan, where less than 1 percent claim Christianity and the average

church is between 20 and 30 people.

When the initial planning for the Franklin Graham event began several years ago, a smaller venue seating around 5,000 was targeted. But as excitement built and local leadership continued to pray, the move to the 10,000-seat Budakan was selected.

“Doing four events in three days,” Hammond said. “We’re pretty much filling up every [event]. The response is very encouraging to the pastors.”

Helping create excitement for what God can do in this region, Michael W. Smith and members of the Tommy Coomes Band made advance trips to Tokyo this summer. The Tommy Coomes Band held seminars for worship leaders, while Michael W. Smith performed nine concerts in four days to help promote the Christian Life and Witness classes believers are encouraged to take before every BGEA Crusade event.

“We didn’t think we’d get 1,200 people and 2,300 people signed up,” Hammond said.

Michael Chang, former U.S. tennis prodigy who won the French Open at age 17 and current tennis coach of Japan’s Kei Nishikori, spoke at two other pre-Celebration events.

Matt Murton and Trey Hillman, two Major League Baseball figures with Japanese baseball ties, also helped spread the word about the upcoming opportunity for revival to spark in Japan. Murton, a former Chicago Cubs prospect, broke Ichiro Suzuki’s single-season hit record with the Hanshin Tigers. Hillman is the bench coach for the Houston Astros and formerly managed both the Kansas City Royals and the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters.

There have also been many key business leaders donating resources and a concerted prayer effort on the 20th of every month. Pastors and other believers have gathered at the

Budokan and walked around the arena praying for God to wake up the Tokyo metro area, where more than 37 million people reside.

“The day we start the Celebration (Nov. 20), we’re going to have a Jericho Prayer Walk and walk around the Budokan seven times.”

Having the Celebration at the Budokan is certainly drawing interest. Besides Michael W. Smith and the Tommy Coomes Band, local bands Night de Light, Saluki and New Wings will be singing as well as Lena Maria Klingvall and Hillsong Worship. There will also be 100 hip-hop dancers performing as well as a 1,500-member choir to close out the Celebration on Sunday.

All of the music will be pointing to one thing—lasting hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

“Our initial goal was to get 400 churches involved, and we’re at 465,” Hammond said. “The Celebration of Love is not about gathering Christians together. Our goal is to bring out the unchurched, those who don’t know Jesus.”