

Iraqi Christians Face New Wave of Attacks

✖ **April 7, 2009** – As President Obama made a surprise visit to Iraq today to meet with military and government leaders, Christians in the nation faced what many fear may be a new wave of anti-Christian violence.

Four Iraqi Christians were murdered within two days last week. On Wednesday, Shabah Aziz Suliman was reportedly killed in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, and the following day, Nimrud Khuder Moshi and two women, Gilawez Nissan Musa and Hanaa Ishaq Poulis, were murdered in Dora, a historically Christian neighborhood in Baghdad, according to *The Middle East Times*.

Musa and Poulis, who were buried last weekend, were stabbed more than 50 times in their home and were discovered by one of the women's 9-year-old granddaughter, the *Los Angeles Times* reported. On a black funeral banner hanging near Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church in Dora, the women's deaths were attributed to "a cowardly terrorist attack," the newspaper said.

"The killing of four innocent people within the last two days has put a renewed fear in our hearts," said Julian Taimoorazy, president of Iraqi Christian Relief Council, in an interview last week with International Christian Concern (ICC). "What is important is to keep these continuous atrocities in the media and on the policy makers' radars. What we need is a more safe and secure Iraq for all of Iraqis, especially for the Christians who have faced ethno-religious cleansing."

The attackers remain unidentified, but ICC said Islamic fundamentalists, gangs and other armed groups have been behind past anti-Christian violence in Iraq.

Since 2003, roughly 750 Christians have been murdered, said Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk. Among them was the archbishop of Mosul, Paulos Faraj Rahho, who was kidnapped and murdered in March 2008 outside of Mosul, located in northern Iraq. Another 13 Christians were killed in Mosul within four weeks last fall, forcing at least 13,000 Iraqi believers to flee their homes.

An Assyrian Christian representative who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisal said Iran and other Muslim countries are flooding Iraq with money to sway the government, leaving minority groups without proper resources or adequate security. He said Western officials have been unwilling to interfere, putting Iraqi believers at the mercy of Islamic fundamentalists.

"The radical Islamists are taking over the country against the will of the Iraqis, and it appears we are so afraid of 'taking sides' that we stand by and watch not wanting to be 'sectarian,'" he said.

He said various organizations have repeatedly presented proposals to U.S. officials, seeking help for Iraqi Christians to start businesses and get increased security in their neighborhoods. But he said resources earmarked to assist Iraqi minorities have aided geographic areas, not specific ethnic groups.

"Nobody's doing anything for these people," the source said.

"It's like they think [the Christians] should just leave," he added.

In recent years, thousands of Iraqi Christians-the oldest community of Christians in the world-have fled the nation in the face of anti-Christian violence led, in part, by Islamic extremists who often think Christians support the coalition forces because they share the same faith as the West.

According to the last Iraqi government figures, some 2.5 million Christians lived in Iraq in 2002, comprising roughly 10 percent of the population. Only 1.2 million remain today, with persecution forcing nearly half of them to take refuge in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

William Warda, chairman of the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization, worries that the recent murders in predominantly Christian areas will prevent refugees from returning.

"We are very concerned at this dramatic rise in violence immediately following the recent elections," Warda told the *Middle East Times*. "This will greatly affect those displaced outside the countries we are counting on to return and cause many more to leave the country, just when things were calming."

Although he did not attribute it to the murders, Warda noted that Iraq's new constitution cites Islam as the nation's official religion, which he said hampers religious freedom. "Most people outside Iraq are not aware of the simple fact that it is against the law and the punishment can be death for the most basic human freedom-the freedom to change one's religion," he said.

Jonathan Racho, ICC's regional manager for Africa and the Middle East, called on Christians to pray for the church in Iraq. He said their suffering has been "beyond description and is not yet over."

"The latest martyrdom of our brothers should serve to awaken churches in the Western countries to come to the aid of their Iraqi brothers and sisters," he said. "We call upon Iraqi officials and the allied forces in Iraq to avert further attacks against Iraqi Christians. It is simply unacceptable to watch the extinction of the Christian community from Iraq."

To support the work of Assyrian Christians and other groups assisting Iraqi believers, log on at Christian Life Missions to make tax-deductible contributions.