

Bloody Week in Iraq Raises Religicide Concerns



AP Images/Emad Matti

Although no one claimed the bloodiest day this year for Iraq, the attacks this week bore the hallmark of Al-Qaida.

Suicide bombers, car bombs and roadside explosives hit more than a dozen Iraqi cities and towns. The explosions killed roughly 70 people. Homes, business and houses of worship were targeted.

Todd Nettleton with Voice of the Martyrs says the group behind the Monday assault was sending a message.

"When you talk about more than 40 attacks coordinated all across the entire country, you're talking about: 'We're still here and we can make a lot of trouble.' I think the other message that they're sending is: 'You should be very afraid,'" he said.

As U.S. troops draw down and leave Iraq, the Christians there have a very real concern. Nettleton explains that they're wondering if the government can respond to the threats against them. Believers are asking, "Who will protect us? Who will make sure that our churches are not bombed, that our people are not attacked and killed?"

Nettleton says, "There's a very real concern about what role the Iraqi government will play in providing protection for the Christian

citizens of Iraq to meet together, to gather for worship.”

Attempts to destabilize the region have been ongoing, but there has been a concerted effort to erase the presence of the Christians in Iraq since the beginning of the war. Watchdog groups like Open Doors USA and Voice of the Martyrs have been calling the eradication effort a “religicide.”

According to Open Doors’ statistics, there are fewer than 250,000 Christians who call Iraq home. Thousands more are reported to have fled to neighboring countries. The resilience of the insurgency threatens to disrupt outreach efforts.

Nettleton says their teams are active in many directions, but the two most obvious are through Bible distribution and Action Packs.

Whenever possible, VOM will distribute complete copies of the Bible. Where it is too dangerous or costly to deliver complete Bibles, VOM will deliver New Testaments.

When participants order an Action Pack, Voice of the Martyrs will send a special pre-printed vacuum bag and a list of suggested items which are needed.

Participants purchase items, fill the bags, and ship them back to The

Voice of the Martyrs who will distribute them along with a color Gospel storybook, *He Lived Among Us*.

These help keep believers encouraged. Nettleton says the projects allow Christians to answer these questions: “How do we live out the gospel? How do we share our faith with the people

around us when there's so much danger and so much threat?"

Equipped with these tools, the resources of the church are also keeping doors open to share the hope of the Gospel. "The other thing that comes to mind is acts of love and service," says Nettleton. "We've heard of churches in Iraq that are providing medical clinics, medical care, and medicines. They are really seeking to be Christ."

Is it effective? Nettleton thinks so. "When all around you is turmoil, and yet you have a peace in your heart and a peace on your face, that is a witness in and of itself, without ever saying anything."

Pray for protection for Christians during this time of upheaval and danger. Pray for ministry opportunities for churches and Christian relief organizations working in Iraq.

Nettleton adds, "We can pray for the salvation of the attackers, the troublemakers, the people in Iraq, to come to know Christ in a personal way."