

Would Someone Please Tell Obama Iraqi Christians Are Dying?

It's starting to seem as if the Obama White House operates on a time delay. In the case of Iraq's religious minorities, the results have been deadly.

On June 10, the barbaric extremists called the Islamic State captured the city of Mosul. By mid-July, they issued an edict to the Christians who remained to "convert, leave or be killed."

The White House said nothing.

Beginning on July 22, Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., took to the House floor six times to plead for attention from the Obama administration as genocide threatened Iraq.

Not a word from the president.

On July 24, a resolution sponsored by Reps. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., and Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., "condemning the severe persecution [of] Christians and other ethnic and religious minority communities ... in Iraq" was introduced on the floor of the House. It called for the administration to "develop and implement an immediate, coordinated and sustained humanitarian intervention."

Crickets.

On Aug. 1, the House of Representatives passed a resolution sponsored by Rep. Juan Vargas, D-Calif., calling for protection of religious minorities in Iraq.

It wasn't until Aug. 5 that the administration acknowledged the crisis in Iraq. It was done in the form of a statement,

condemning attacks on religious minorities, by the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power.

By last Thursday, Aug. 7, the largely Christian towns of Qaraqosh, Tal Kayf, Bartella and Karamlesh had fallen to the Islamic State.

Finally, later that night—and two full months after the crisis began—President Obama announced airstrikes in Iraq and for the first time acknowledged that Christians are being driven from the homeland of their faith. But the Christians garnered a passing mention, while the religious minority of Yazidis seems to be what moved the president to act.

An Iraqi Christian leader lamented to me that his people would have to convert to get the administration's attention.

The Yazidis deserve protection and humanitarian aid, but so do the Christians who number in the hundreds of thousands in Iraq. While the Yazidis received air drops of food and water, nothing has been dropped to the Christians who are homeless and in dire need of food and water. Each day that passes is a matter of life and death.

Why the indifference from the administration?

The disinterest in the suffering of Iraqi Christians has been a bipartisan travesty. During the Bush administration, nearly a million Christians fled Iraq in fear for their lives. Ironically, it was Sen. Barack Obama who sent the Bush State Department a letter in 2007 inquiring about this persecution. Incredibly, the Bush administration denied there was a problem.

Rep. Eshoo, a Chaldean Catholic whose father fled religious persecution in Iran, told me, "This issue has been viewed with a real Western eye and a lack of understanding and appreciation of who is there and how important these religious minorities are. In the case of the Christians, these are the

oldest Christians in the world. They represent part of the glue for a diverse society if there is to be one there. This whole issue represents an American value of diversity and protection of minorities.”

Someone please tell the president.

Kirsten Powers writes weekly for USA Today.

Copyright 2014 Religion News Service. All rights reserved. No part of this transmission may be distributed or reproduced without written permission.