

Amid Iraqi Terror Crisis, Light of Christ Is Dawning

Before sending the first wave of military “advisers,” U.S. officials expressed reservations about putting combat “boots on the ground” in Iraq again to deal with a fierce Islamist terrorist threat in the country’s unstable northern regions.

But a Tennessee-based Christian relief organization has had its own “boots on the ground” in this dangerous territory for the past nine months and is showing no signs of backing down in the face of the ruthless militants’ convert-or-be-slaughtered ultimatum.

“Despite the atrocities being committed by ISIS [short for the Islamist State of Iraq and Syria], Iraq represents an opportunity to bring the hope and love of the Gospel,” says Crisis Response International (CRI) Director Sean Malone.

Teams of CRI responders—a combination of staff and trained volunteers—are committed to bringing a witness of God’s love in tangible ways providing food, shelter and medical needs to hundreds in Iraq daily, he said. But most importantly, CRI is praying and bringing the peace and salvation of Jesus into the hearts of hundreds of Iraq residents who are desperate for answers.

Workers have been on the ground in Iraq for more than nine months after responding to the increasing crisis and displacement of more than 1 million Syrian refugees late last year.

“We already had teams on the ground and were positioned to respond to the thousands that needed us when the ISIS crisis broke out,” said Malone.

This vision and resolve is why the Christian organization is

committed to ministering to the desperate situation in Iraq, when most other organizations have pulled out of the area or are still considering whether to get involved. Since December 2013, CRI has been laboring to support and reach the Syrian refugees with basic needs and the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the ISIS crisis broke out late this spring, the ministry had an established base, teams on the ground and expertise in the area.

“The question of the hour isn’t if we should pull out, it’s how can we meet and respond in Christ’s love and service to the overwhelming need that exists in Iraq since ISIS terrorists have displaced thousands,” said Malone.

CRI personnel in Iraq now are from New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, California, Tennessee and Colorado. Teams are rotating in and out of the area and typically staying about 14 days. To stay longer, they would need visas and additional government approvals. CRI may go that extra mile in cases where it wants certain people to assist in the long term. But in this case, because of the stressful environment in northern Iraq and the dangers its personnel face, shorter-term trips were deemed better for the volunteers.

Responders reported to their home office in Nashville this week that a new refugee camp has just formed to hold about 2,000 families. Another 5,000 people are in dire straits right down the road from their base with no aid organization in site, so CRI is stepping in to supply basic needs such as diapers, food and more there as well. As refugees are displaced, they tend to congregate together.

Hundreds of Iraqis are coming to the Lord every week as CRI is providing Christian leadership in the midst of this crisis. If the world is asking, “What’s the church’s response to hundreds of thousands of displaced and disenfranchised refugees in crisis?” CRI missionaries immediately responded by sending \$50,000 worth of supplies to contribute to the aid efforts

with 10 staff members on the ground in Iraq right now. But the need is truly huge, and more support is needed, urgently.

“If you aren’t a trained responder through CRI, you can partner with us financially and by sharing our news releases via email and social media. We need your help spreading the word that in the midst of this horrible tragedy, God is breaking through with His light,” said Malone.

“This is the church’s hour, and a great opportunity to bring the hope of the Gospel to areas that are just devastated by crises,” said Malone. “One hundred percent of donations go directly to the crisis supplying food, water, beds and medical clinics in Iraq.

“Churches have closed, people are homeless sleeping in the streets. It’s one of the worst situations we’ve been involved with, but now is when we’re needed most. Now is the time for the church to show the love of Jesus,” he added.

CRI is a nonprofit organization that resources, trains and mobilizes volunteers, churches and other organizations to respond to disasters and compassion initiatives around the world. It provides a model and framework for responding to disaster situations and delivering resources to areas that would otherwise be off-limits to volunteers. CRI says its procedures and training avoid what the government calls “the second disaster,” referring to the chaos that often ensues when spontaneous resources and untrained volunteers arrive on a chaotic scene.

To make a donation visit on your smartphone and text the word “ISISCRISIS” to 41444 and you will receive a link to give in whatever amount you like via credit or debit card.

For more stories and testimonies of the ministry’s work in Iraq, visit .

This story was reported by CRI personnel on the ground in Iraq

and written by Mark Andrews and Kyle Patterson. Patterson is a communications specialist with Thrive Media Group of Buffalo, New York, which works mostly with nonprofits. Andrews' latest book is a Christian military thriller in which U.S. aviators help defend Israel during a new Mideast war.