

Christmas Day Iraq Bombing Spurs Cries for Intercession

Christmas is a dangerous time for Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus in many countries around the world. The apparent targeting of Christians occurred again Wednesday in Baghdad, Iraq, where militants killed at least 37 people—most of them Christians—in two bomb attacks, according to BBC News.

One bomb exploded outside of the St. John's Catholic Church while worshippers were leaving a Christmas Day service, killing at least 26. Another bomb ripped through an outside market in a Christian neighborhood, killing at least 11. There were an estimated 60 wounded in the two bombings.

Pastor Tariq (not his real name) told Open Doors recently that “churches are targets for terrorists, especially on Christmas Day. Many Christians stay home because they are too afraid.”

An Open Doors field worker said in an earlier report: “We received documents and threats stating that the aim of Islamist insurgents is to make Iraq a ‘Muslim only’ country. They want Christians out.”

Iraq is No. 4 on the 2013 Open Doors World Watch List, which ranks countries that are the worst persecutors of Christians. It is estimated there are only 330,000 Christians left in Iraq, as many have fled the country due to violence and persecution. In the early 1990s there were an estimated 1.2 million Christians.

According to the Associated Press, the total number of people killed this month in Iraq is 441 while the United Nations estimates more than 8,000 people have been killed since the first of the year.

David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA, urges Christians in the West to pray fervently for all the Christians affected by the killings.

“There is a concerted effort by extremists to drive Christians out of the Middle East,” he says. “Iraq not only is a hostile, volatile environment in general, but often the violence is directed specifically towards Christians. As a result, one of our field workers said that if the exodus of Christians from Iraq continues at the current pace, it is possible there could be no Christians left in Iraq by 2020.

“Only the power of prayer is going to improve the conditions for believers in Iraq and countries such as Syria and Iran,” Curry continues. “Pray that the families of the victims will feel the embrace of Jesus. Pray that the government of Iraq will do more to protect people of all faiths. And pray that in 2014 Christians will be able to worship the Lord in peace and freedom.”

Curry adds that attacks on Christians during Christmas and New Year’s Eve is a “very disturbing trend.” He cited the bombing of the Two Saints Coptic Church in Alexandria, Egypt, on New Year’s Eve and attacks on Christians in Nigeria on Christmas Eve the last three years.

The Open Doors ministry in Iraq includes trauma counseling, biblical training for church leaders and Muslim Background Believers, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, community development projects and working with Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) in northern Iraq.