

Radical Muslims Invade Monastery, Steal 'Everything' From Iraqi Christians

After every known Christian is reported to have left Mosul, Islamic State fighters, IS, have now taken over a monastery near the largely Christian town of Qaraqosh, 32 miles southeast of Mosul.

According to Agence France Presse IS expelled its three resident monks, a cleric and a few families living there, ordering them to leave on foot with nothing but their clothes.

Members of the self-proclaimed "Islamic Caliphate" stormed the ancient 4th-century monastery Mar (Saint) Behnam, run by the Syriac Catholic church on Sunday, July 20.

"You have no place here anymore, you have to leave immediately," a member of the Syriac clergy quoted the Sunni militants as telling the monastery's residents.

According to AFP, the monks walked several miles before being picked up by armed Kurdish fighters who drove them to Qaraqosh.

The BBC reported that Syriac Catholic leaders have said priceless manuscripts, about both the history of Iraq and the church, are now at risk in the monastery.

Militants of IS are reported to have killed Dr. Mahmoud Al-Asali, a professor of law at the University of Mosul on Monday.

According to , Al-Asali, a Muslim, was killed for objecting to IS looting and destroying Iraqi Christians' possessions in Mosul, but WWM could not independently verify this.

The office and residence of the Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, Yohanna Petros Moshe (in one building) has been burned down.

He is now in Qaraqosh, where World Watch Monitor spoke to him: "My concern now is how to feed and shelter all the people who have fled," he told us.

Syrian Catholic priest Nizar Semaan, who works with Archbishop Moshe, said to Agenzia Fides that the international community has a "disturbing passivity to what is happening in that area."

Semaan continued, "For example, the time has come to include these groups in the list of terrorist organizations condemned by international bodies, and above all it is necessary to make public the names of the countries and forces that finance them. Intelligence agencies and the governments of various countries certainly know where certain weapons and money, that keep these groups going, come from. It would be enough to stop the flow for a month, and these groups would not have any more force."

He also said it is necessary to involve leaders and followers of Sunni Islam in an effort to isolate the jihadist groups.

IS demands Christians convert to Islam, pay a fine or face death. On Friday, the al-Qaida splinter group IS issued an ultimatum to Iraqi Christians living in Mosul. They said by Saturday at noon (Iraqi time) they must convert to Islam, pay a fine or face "death by the sword."

According to CNN, the IS-appointed governor of Mosul, Salman al-Farisi, declared that any family choosing to stay in Mosul and refusing to convert to Islam would be required to pay 550,000 Iraqi dinars (about \$470).

The people who decided to leave, out of fear or an inability to pay the fine, were prohibited from taking with them

anything but the clothes they were wearing, and a total of 52 Christian families left Mosul early Saturday morning.

“They told us, ‘You are to leave all of your money, gold, jewelry and go out with only the clothes on you,’” Wadie Salim told CNN. Other sources told World Watch Monitor everything had been taken from them at the checkpoints, even including medicines.

On Saturday, Chaldean patriarch Louis Sako, told AFP: “Christian families are on their way to Dohuk and Erbil” in Kurdistan. Bishop Yosip Benjamin in the neighbouring town of Tel Keif, told *The Telegraph*, “We’re providing people with shelter, food and water ... they can’t travel without the money to buy tickets.” And he said Tel Keif’s residents were fearful of suffering the same fate as their Mosul neighbors.

UNICEF confirmed the Christians’ exodus from Mosul: Dr. Marzio Babbile is its Iraq Representative. “Most of (them) are moving towards the towns of Tilkif, Batnaya and Alqosh. Forty families have moved to the east, towards Qaraqosh, and 30 have been accepted in the province of Dohuk. Twenty families have reached Erbil, the capital of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, where a small reception center in collaboration with the Chaldean Archdiocese was set up.”

Global Reactions to ISIS

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has issued a statement “condemning IS attacks in the strongest terms—the systematic persecution of minority populations in Iraq by the Islamic State [of Iraq and Syria] and associated armed groups.”

The U.N. chief highlighted that “any systematic attack on the civilian population or segments of the civilian population, because of their ethnic background, religious beliefs or faith may constitute a crime against humanity.”

Late on Monday the 15-member Security Council also “denounced the persecution of Christians and other minority groups in northern Iraq, which used to be home to minority communities that had lived together for hundreds of years before coming under direct attack by the group known as (IS) and its allies.”

The U.S. State Department also “condemns in the strongest terms the systematic persecution of ethnic and religious minorities by the terrorist group [IS], adding that the U.S. government was “outraged by ISIS’s recent announcement that Christians in Mosul must either convert, pay a tax, leave or face execution in the coming days.”

Human Rights Watch has published a report outlining the killing, kidnapping and threatening of religious and ethnic minorities in Mosul since IS captured Iraq’s second largest city on June 10.

“ISIS should immediately halt its vicious campaign against minorities in and around Mosul,” said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch.

The actions of IS, which also is involved in the Syrian insurgency, have been strongly condemned by Muslim experts. On the ground in Baghdad this Sunday, local Muslims joined Christians at a service to show their solidarity. *The New York Times* reported a Muslim woman sitting next to a Christian woman who was in tears, whispering to her, “You are the true original people here, and we are sorry for what has been done to you in the name of Islam.”