

2nd Opinion: Who will answer Iraqi Christians' cries for help?

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Iraq's Christians are begging the world for help. Is anybody listening?

Since capturing the country's second-largest city, Mosul, in early June, the Islamic State, formerly known as ISIS, has ordered Christians to convert to Islam, pay taxes levied on non-Muslims or die. The extremist Sunni group also is persecuting and murdering Turkmen and Shabaks, both Muslim religious minorities.

✘ Kirsten Powers Human rights lawyer Nina Shea described the horror in Mosul: The Islamic State "took the Christians' houses, took the cars they were driving to leave. They took all their money. One old woman had her life savings of \$40,000, and she said, 'Can I please have \$100?' And they said no. They took wedding rings off fingers, chopping off fingers if they couldn't get the ring off.

"We now have 5,000 destitute, homeless people with no future. This is a crime against humanity."

For the first time in 2,000 years, Mosul is devoid of Christians. "This is ancient Nineveh we are talking about," Shea explained. "They took down all the crosses. They blew up the tomb of the prophet Jonah. An orthodox Cathedral has been turned into a mosque. ... They are uprooting every vestige of Christianity."

University of Mosul professor Mahmoud Al 'Asali, a Muslim, bravely spoke out against the Islamic State's purging of Christians and was executed.

Religious cleansing

Lebanon-based Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younnan, who heads the Syrian Catholic Church, called the crisis “religious cleansing.”

“I want to tell American Christians to stand up, wake up and no longer be a silent majority. American-elected representatives need to stand up for their principles on which the United States has been founded:—the defense of religious freedom ... and respect for human rights.”

Mosul’s Christians have fled to Kurdistan, which is providing refuge. Going back to Mosul is not an option. The Islamic State has given their houses and businesses away. There is nothing to go back to even if the Islamic State left.

Virginia Republican Rep. Frank Wolf has taken to the House floor three times to plead for action from the United States and world community.

“The Kurds have done a good job, but they are bearing the burden,” Wolf said in an interview. “President Obama should thank and encourage the Kurds for protecting the Christians. He also needs to provide (humanitarian aid), including funds for water and food.”

Happened before in Baghdad

Though many Iraq War boosters have claimed that keeping U.S. troops there would have avoided this atrocity, Shea pointed out that a million Christians left Iraq in the decade before the Islamic State’s purge campaign. The U.S. invasion “did not benefit the Christians at all. Back in 2007, jihadists moved into Baghdad’s Christian Dora neighborhood and did just what they are doing in Mosul now. We had 100,000 troops on the ground, and we pushed them out, but the Christians never got back their property.”

Patriarch Younan concurred: “Christians used to live (peacefully) and get educated. But since the invasion in 2003, there is ... no safety.”

Kirsten Powers writes for USA Today, which copyrighted this article, distributed by Religion News Service.