



Armed Kurdish Groups Terrorize Assyrian Town in Iraq

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(AINA) -- Armed men reported to be with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) attacked the Church of Mar Youhanna in Bakhdeda, northern Iraq, during Christmas Mass. The armed Kurds opened fire upon the local volunteer guards protecting the church. The armed group then fired indiscriminately towards the parishioners in order to terrorize them. Two of the volunteer guards were wounded by the attack. A formal complaint was lodged with the local Kurdish authorities but the file was later disposed of and the case ignored.

In another incident, an armed group from the KDP forced their way into the homes of several residents of Bakhdeda. The excuse given by the armed gang was that some of the locals were members of the Baath Party. The residents are adamant that there are no Baath members among their people. Several residents were gathered up, severely beaten, insulted, and finally taken away. Their whereabouts are still unknown.

As part of the same campaign, an armed KDP group attacked a Syriac-Assyrian family in Bakhdeda, forcing their way into their home, terrorizing and abusing them. The armed group later said that the Syriac-Assyrian family has a relative who is married to a man loyal to the KDP and would therefore confiscate their home and use it as a KDP base. The armed Kurds, now living in the family's home, were later joined by more members of the KDP.

Attacks have also been conducted on the government county building in Bakhdeda, where the director of the Land Deed Records Office was repeatedly beaten causing severe head trauma. His employees were also insulted, terrorized and told to run away or stay and do as commanded by the armed Kurds. The county offices have yet to reopen since the attacks.

Furthermore, the oil and gas which is distributed to the county's Fuel Distribution Center is repeatedly stolen by armed gangs. Members of the Kurdish parties steal the county's government distributed portion of oil and gas and divide it among their own members, who turn around and sell it on the black market. Whenever a shipment of oil or gas arrives, shots ring out to signal to the members to proceed with their criminal acts. The shots also serve to terrorize the Syriac-Assyrian population and remind them that joining the ranks of the KDP would be advantageous.

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