



Car Bomber Targets Baghdad Adventist Church

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Baghdad (APD) -- The Baghdad Seventh-day Adventist Church has been targeted by a car bomb for the second time in two years, injuring an armed guard, one of two permanently stationed to protect the church compound.

The Vatican embassy in Baghdad and another Christian church in the city, as well as two churches in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk were also targeted in the attack, according to the IRIN news service, a United Nations news and humanitarian information service, which also reports that some Christians have decided to leave the country. IRIN also reported that 16 people have been killed and 20 injured in the coordinated attacks.

Christians make up about 3 percent of the population of Iraq, or an estimated 800,000 people, according to a 2005 census, IRIN reported. Kirkuk is home to the second largest Christian community after Baghdad.

At around 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 29, guards observed a car maneuvering onto the pavement on the east side of the church. When they challenged the driver, he told them that he was merely walking to a nearby kiosk to buy some cigarettes and would return momentarily. They grew suspicious of the man and were returning to the guard post to retrieve their weapons and sound the alert when the car exploded.

This most recent bomb-inflicted damage comes less than a month after the Adventist Church finally completed repairs caused by a series of explosions in the neighbourhood, the worst one happening in October 2003 when another car was stuffed with 150 kg of dynamite and detonated on the other side of the church. "On 31 December 2005 we even obtained a refund from the government after we finished all the repairs and renovations from the previous explosions," said Basim Fargo, president for the Adventist Church in Iraq, who is now faced with the dispiriting task of, yet again, replacing broken windows and doors.

After being informed of the explosion and encouraging church administrators in Iraq by phone, the president for the Adventist Church in the Middle East, Dr. Kjell Aune, appealed to the worldwide Adventist Church to let the members in Iraq sense that they are being "carried forward on a wave of prayers."

Aune said, "Our brothers and sisters living and worshipping in the war-torn country of Iraq need our prayers and support. They live in a very dangerous climate with their faith challenged daily. Pray that God will give our people peace of heart, confidence in the Lord and safety. Pray that the political development of the country will be such that our church may continue to exist and our believers may be able to live out their faith and grow in numbers."

On Monday, 400 local Christian clerics demonstrated in Baghdad against the violence. Many protestors opined that the targeting of Christian institutions was a direct result of foreign occupation, according to the IRIN report.

"Christians are being forced to leave Iraq after years of peace," said Fr. Ismael Kardush, an Orthodox Christian cleric participating in the demonstration. "They can't target the Americans, so they target us for having the same religion, even if we're fellow Arabs."

"The government should do something to protect us," Kardush added.

The latest bombing is not the first time that attacks appeared to target areas associated with the Christian community. In August 2004, at least 12 people were killed and dozens injured in a spate of bombings that targeted Christians in Baghdad and Mosul.

According to local organizations, about 150,000 Christians are believed to have left the country since 2003.