



AINA News

Report Highlights Suffering of Iraqi Assyrian Refugees in Jordan

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(AINA) -- Award winning filmmaker and investigative freelance journalist Nuri Kino ([CV](#)) traveled to Amman, the capital of Jordan, to meet with Christian Assyrians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) families from Iraq. His mission was to penetrate deeper than the daily articles and news reports, a quest to hear the refugees' own stories. He traveled with Sister Hatune Dogan, a philanthropist who runs her own relief organization called "Helping Hand to the Poor." They were joined in Amman with Febroniya Atto, a lawyer from Holland.

Their report ([PDF](#)) begins by revealing that the Jordanian government does not accept the Iraqis as refugees but as "guests." The implication of this terminology is that the refugees are deprived of the status that would entitle them their rights as established by the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 and its 1967 protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Jordanian government admits, by referring to their own calculations, that there are 750,000 Iraqi refugees stranded in Jordan. Only 25,000 are registered with the UNHCR, that's just 3 per cent of the total number the Jordanian government acknowledges as Iraqi guests. The UNHCR concedes that the reason why the figures of those registered are so low is the fact that the refugees are afraid of being discovered by the authorities if they register at the UNHCR. Those that do register are provided with "protection cards," which identifies them as registered refugees. But the Jordanian authorities do not care about the cards. Anyone without a valid visa is arrested and repatriated, with or without the UNHCR issued protection cards ([AINA, 5-11-2007](#)).

The financial burden imposed on the refugees is staggering. With no means to a regular income because they are unemployable, coupled with the exorbitant rental rates, most are living in substandard conditions and dependent on handouts from local church organizations and Caritas International. A local aid worker with Caritas describes their almost impossible task of helping the refugees. "The burden is heavy; we cannot even meet people anymore. They have to wait several months to meet us because of the long queue. Four to five cases a week are denied help," says a Caritas employee name Gaby as her smile changes into a sad expression. "It is easy to run short of money. Some refugees have cancer or heart diseases; they are impossible to help because the costs are too heavy."

The report, **By God -- Six Days In Amman**, tells the story of the tragedy that has befallen the Christians of Iraq, who are often neglected by the mainstream media. Widower Hana tells us the reason why she is now living in squalid conditions. Hana's husband never returned from work one day. He ran his own electrical appliances shop. The kidnapers called late in the evening. They demanded 50,000 Dollars for his release. She told them it was impossible. She did not have that much money. She managed to collect 6,000 Dollars with the help of relatives, friends and neighbors. The kidnapers told her to go to a graveyard and put the bag with the money in a certain place. Her cousin refused to let her go. If she were killed her children would become orphans. He went instead of her. The kidnapers took the bag.

But it took some days before they called again. They called and said they wanted more money but this time not as a ransom for her husband. They had already shot "the unfaithful Christian dog," they said; they wanted money so they would not shoot her and her children.

The psychological scars alone, inflicted by the forces of evil would drive the best of us insane. But to struggle on a daily basis, with 7-10 persons crammed in a tiny unfurnished apartment and afraid to venture out because of the threat of deportation, leaves most of the Christian refugees in a state of utter despair. George Hazo of the Middle East Council of Churches says that what upsets him the most is the fact that not all refugee children go to school. Some children have not attended school for as long as four years. Public schools are free and the refugees have the right to enroll, but there are not enough places and reasons are made up in order to keep the refugee children away. Private schools cost 1000 Dollars per year, something few Iraqis can afford.

Most of the Christian refugees consider it futile to apply for travel visas to most Western countries. They understand that their applications will be refused. A member of the team asked an elderly man if they had applied for a visa to the USA. He said, "It costs 100 Dollars per person and it is meaningless. No one we know has been granted a visa to the US." The report goes on to reveal that some have employed the services of smugglers. The only way to leave Amman seems to be with the help from smugglers. But they do not dare trust the smugglers. Many smugglers take the money and never return. And even if all smugglers were trustworthy they could still not afford it.

The report leaves no one in doubt that the Christians, who were persecuted in Iraq, are now being tormented in Jordan. The Jordanian government must take all necessary measures to ensure the welfare and well being of the refugees. Equally, the UN must assist Jordan with its' refugee crisis. Needless to say, something ought to be done, and done quickly to alleviate the suffering of the Christians of Iraq.

By Albert Michael

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