



Assyrians in California Protest Iraq Church Bombings

Posted GMT 7-29-2009 12:1:57

In a 72 hour span, from July 11 to 13, seven Christian churches were [bombed](#) in Iraq.

The reverberations of those bomb blasts were felt a half a world away here in Turlock, as Assyrian-Americans gathered at Monte Vista Crossings on Saturday evening to protest the lack of protection given to Assyrians still living on their native soil.

"Our people over there need more support, more security," said Charles Givargis, Executive Director of the Assyrian Democratic Movement of Stanislaus County.

"We're trying to say, 'Stop bombing our churches and let our people live in the homeland.'"



Local Assyrians hold up signs and Iraqi flags on the corner of Monte Vista Avenue and Countryside Drive Saturday night in protest of recent Christian church bombings in Iraq.

According to the Assyrian International News Agency, 59 Assyrian churches have been bombed in Iraq since June 26, 2004. The vast majority of those, 40, were located in Baghdad, while 13 were in Mosul, five were in Kirkuk, and one was in Ramadi.

The most recent bombings occurred in the afternoon, according to Givargis, when the churches were relatively empty.

"Since the fall of Saddam, our people have been targeted," Givargis said. "This act was not to kill people. This act was to send a message."

While no definite culprit has been identified, AsiaNews cites unnamed journalist sources that claim Iraqi police believe Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the head of Al Qaeda in Iraq, is responsible. Givargis says that, to find who is behind the attacks, one must simply look to see who will benefit once the land is illegally cleared of native people.

Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution requires that all "administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents," be guaranteed, but the continued bombings and lack of native Assyrian security forces raised concern among the protesters.

"Putting it in the constitution is one thing, and practicing it is another," Givargis said.

"... The proof should be in the pudding."

Assyrian International News Agency

The U.S. Government does not have a policy to protect against the ethnic cleansing of the Assyrian / Chaldean / Syriac Christians, or other Iraqi minority groups such as the Yezidis and Shabaks.

Saturday's protestors, who were organized by the Assyrian Human Rights Committee, argued for dedicated U.S. funding for education, economic development, and human rights and social assistance, given the relative lack of interest shown by the Iraq government.

"We have some good friends in the Congress and they are trying," Givargis said. "They are working very hard."

But, for the Assyrians, things start with security and ensuring safe places of worship. Once the extremely religious people become worried about staples of life such as going to church, some start thinking about leaving, according to Givargis.

For an ethno-religious group that has occupied its homeland in the Ninevah Plains for more than 7,000 years, the idea of being forced out seems unbearable. The Assyrians just want to be part of Iraq, Givargis said, but for that to happen the U.S. government may need to step in.

Assyrian-Americans see their efforts -- including Saturday's protest -- as critical to securing the support of the Obama administration and the future of their homeland.

"The only hope they have is us," Givargis said.

"We cannot give up," he continued. "We cannot give up."

By Alex Cantatore
www.turlockjournal.com

© 2011, Assyrian International News Agency. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use.](#)