



Shiites Attack Assyrian Town in North Iraq

Posted GMT 12-25-2009 22:2:57

Bartilla, North Iraq (AINA) -- A group of armed Shabaks attacked the Assyrian (also known as Chaldean and Syriac) town of Bartilla this Christmas morning without any apparent provocation. The entry checkpoint into Bartilla was taken over and controlled by the attackers for more than 5 hours. Residents report the angry mob barged through the Assyrian market, tearing down Christmas decorations from store windows, including throwing down a picture of St. Mary into the dirt.

Shabak are a minority group scattered over 35 villages located in the east of Mosul. They are mostly Shi'a and Sunni.

According to witnesses, a procession of men, women and children was heading towards the church, singing and holding crosses and relics. The attackers numbered about 100 and were described as outsiders. They were dispersed among the locals and started harassing the children and the people in the procession by throwing rocks at them, which led to confrontations.

The attackers attempted to enter St. Mary church, located in the center of the market, demanding to perform the Shiite rituals of self-flagellation inside the church. The Church guards stopped the attackers, at which time gunfire was exchanged, leaving four Christian residents wounded including a policeman. One man is in critical condition.

Rumors stated the Christians took down Islamic signs. This was denied by the Christian residents. According to a church guard, this never happened.

Witnesses reported the Shabak attackers are also residents of Bartilla and are led by Hassan Ganjou, allegedly a former member of the Mahdi Army (JAM) and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), before working as a private security guard for Shabak Parliament member Dr. Hunain. Mr. Ganjou is currently a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Witnesses report that Mr. Qusay Abbas, the only Shabak member of the Nineveh Provincial Council, was touting a gun and amongst attackers.

This year, Christmas and Ashoura, the Shiite commemoration of Imam Hussain's martyrdom, coincided. Mainly out of fear of reprisals, church officials announced in local and satellite Iraqi TV channels that Christian communities in Iraq, especially in Baghdad and Basra, would not hold public celebrations this year out of "respect" for their fellow Muslim countrymen who are in mourning for Imam Hussain.

The Christian community in Bartilla, which fears further attacks, is unarmed. This small majority Christian town is located approximately 28 miles north of Mosul in the province of Nineveh. The Kurdistan Democratic Party headquarters are located in Bartilla. Sources say that when the KDP members were approached for assistance, their reply was "we can only defend our headquarters."

In the past, Assyrians have included Shabak, Sabeen and Yazidi minorities in their plea for rights and equal treatment under the law for ethnic minorities.

The Governor of Mosul paid a visit to the area to assess to the situation and other provincial military officials have promised Iraqi Army support should the situation escalate. One resident said "this is a stark reminder of the 1933 massacre of our people in [Simeleh and Soriya](#). Are the Christians of Iraq due for another massacre?"

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