

Table of Contents

- ***Christmas brings hope for peace for Aleppo's Christians***
- ***Aleppo celebrates Christmas***
- ***What Trump can do for Aleppo***
- ***Church destroyed in suspected Islamic State night attack in Syria border town***
- ***Christian man forced to convert to Islam in Raqqa, Syria, when unable to continue paying jizya tax to Islamic State (IS)***
- ***Patriarch and other church leaders escape assassination attempt as suicide bomber kills three bodyguards, injures many***
- ***ISIS genocide against 'People of the Book' – How long will Kerry continue to talk around it?***
- ***Knights of Columbus report: ISIS committing Christian 'genocide'***
- ***European Parliament resolution on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' (2016/2529(RSP))***
- ***EPRID's Statement on the European Parliament resolution on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'***
- ***Living as a Christian in the Islamic State***
- ***Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia***
- ***"We cannot ignore this genocide"***
- ***Council of Europe assembly recognises that ISIS committed genocide***
- ***The Genocide of Christians in the Middle East seen from Washington***

Christmas brings hope for peace for Aleppo's Christians

Aleppo celebrates Christmas

Al-monitor (24.12.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2i9jSzi> - The costs of the war in Aleppo have been catastrophic, but the city's Christians are seeking inspiration and hope in the Christmas season.

Jesuit Priest Ziad Hilal, who represents Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic nongovernmental organization in Syria, told The Christian Post, "Despite the harsh conditions the people of Aleppo are enduring, [for both] Christians and Muslims, Christmas brings the hope for peace that we have missed for the last five years. Although many churches have been destroyed in Aleppo, the bells of the other churches will sound and hope they bring us peace," he said.

The population of Aleppo has fallen from 5 million to 1.5 million as a result of the war; only 30,000 Christians remain, from a pre-war community of 120,000.

Patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch Ignatius Joseph III Younan reported that half a million Syrian Christians, a quarter of the community, have fled as a result of the

war and 140 churches and monasteries have been abandoned, vandalized or destroyed throughout the country.

In September, Pope Francis said that those responsible for the bombing of civilians in Syria would be "accountable to God." On Dec. 12, the pope sent a personal letter to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad appealing for "an end to the violence, and the peaceful resolution of hostilities, condemning all forms of extremism and terrorism from whatever quarter they may come."

The past year has witnessed a continued assault on the region's Christian communities by the Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist groups. On Dec. 11, IS bombed St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, the largest church in the Middle East, killing 25 and wounding 49. In March, US Secretary of State John Kerry accused IS of genocide against Christians, Yazidis, Shiites and other groups in Iraq and Syria and throughout the Middle East.

Antonio Guterres, the incoming UN secretary-general, recently said that Christians are part of the "DNA of the Middle East." The hope here is that the Christmas season, and the coming year, will allow Christians, Muslims, Jews and all religions to reclaim their common heritage and work together on a shared vision of the region that is rooted in interfaith tolerance and community. The Christmas celebrations in Aleppo, the first in years, may be a faint, but hopeful, start on this journey.

Syria is source of rising terror in Turkey

Cengiz Candar writes that following the assassination of Russian ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov on Dec. 19, "Turkish authorities, without losing a beat, turned to what has become their common measure after every terror incident and blocked Twitter and ordered a media blackout on the issue. This was followed by cliché statements where government officials condemned the terror and said that terrorism could not divert Turkey from its course and that the criminals will be severely punished, and so forth. Officials were quick to declare that the killing of the Russian ambassador was 'a provocation aiming at undermining the increasing cooperation and good relations between the two countries.'

"Whoever committed the two terror acts in Istanbul and Kayseri and whatever the reason behind the assassination of the ambassador, there is no doubt that Syria is the major source of mounting terror in Turkey."

Syria has amplified Turkey's regional isolation and accelerated Ankara's deepening collaboration with Russia. Candar explains, "There are some in the region who see the escalation of violence in Turkey in terms of redressing the balance of power in Syria. In this regard, Turkey is chosen as the weakest of the involved actors of the Syrian equation. Turkey's weakness is apparently manifested by its growing dependence on Russia. It appears that the assassination of the Russian ambassador, more than impairing the relationship, may be pushing an embarrassed Turkey more into the Russian fold, at least in the short term."

Turkey is now a fault line in the Syrian war. "This situation Turkey finds itself in is, more than anything else, of Turkey's own making," Candar concludes. "It seems that this 'impossible war,' with its many fronts being waged simultaneously, has invited the violence generated in Syria into Turkey. As much as Turkey is getting into the Syrian swamp, the Syrian spillover into Turkey could turn into a flood."

Turkish resentment of Iran escalates

Semih Idiz writes, "The 'fall' of Aleppo has left the staunchly Sunni Islamist support base of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in

Turkey with a deep sense of defeatism and resentment, and it has even prompted calls for revenge to be wreaked on Turkish Alevis.”

Idiz notes, “The fact that Ankara has been noticeably mute over Russian involvement in the defeat of rebel fighters in Aleppo, and all the atrocities this has entailed, does not sit well with all of Erdogan’s supporters. The general tone toward Russia among these supporters has nevertheless been one of restraint. Iran, however, has emerged as the archenemy, and the vitriol against that country is laced with religious and historical imagery that clearly reflects sectarian sentiments. Calls by pro-government opinion-makers in the media for protests outside Iran’s missions in Turkey have also been heeded. This has resulted in a formal protest by Tehran, which indicates that the two countries may be heading for fresh tensions in their already strained ties due to Syria.”

Mustafa Akyol explains that the rise of anti-Iranian sectarianism in Turkey “did not happen because Turkey’s Sunni Islamists suddenly became sectarian after a theological soul-searching. It happened because of a major political drama they witnessed: the Syrian civil war. From the beginning of the war in spring 2011, both the Turkish government led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan (then prime minister, and now president) and the Islamists in its base focused on the brutality of the Syrian regime over its people — especially the Sunni opposition. When Iran and proxies such as Hezbollah emerged as the biggest protectors of this regime, the anger at Bashar al-Assad and his ‘Shabiha’ turned into anger against Iran and the broader ‘Shiite-Alevi axis’ in the region.”

“Lately, Iraq added more to this picture,” Akyol adds. “Turkey’s mainstream Islamists have never supported the Islamic State (IS), and rather saw it as an extremist force that puts shame on Islam. Yet at times they ‘understood’ it as a Sunni reaction to the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad. The latter’s Shiite militia, especially the Popular Mobilization Units, became notorious in the Turkish Islamist media as a force as brutal as IS and a major threat to the Sunnis of Iraq.”

What Trump can do for Aleppo

By Ján Figel’ and Mark Goldfeder

CNN (18.12.2016) - <http://cnn.it/2gZK0m9> - he US President-elect walks onto the world stage facing a question: Will this century of genocides end or continue?

Donald Trump comes to power amid what has been called "the complete meltdown of humanity" in Syria, with US Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power demanding of UN member states Syria, Iran, and Russia: "Are you truly incapable of shame?"

Power's speech at a UN Security Council Emergency Briefing on Syria also invoked history's scenes of horror: "Aleppo will join the ranks of those events in world history that define modern evil, that stain our conscience decades later. Halabja, Rwanda, Srebrenica, and now, Aleppo."

Her words, while an accurate indictment of the current situation in Syria, are also a prescient reminder that generations of American leaders have been confronted with the savagery of genocide and have failed to take appropriate action.

If the scenes emerging from Aleppo show us anything, it is that the Trump administration must now grapple with this legacy and simply put, do better. The United States, through its executive branch, must call upon the United Nations to take action.

The people of the world, especially those in the darkest of places, are looking to America, the European Union, and the international community of democracies with their hopes, and their very lives, at stake. We should not abandon our basic duties, and these people, yet again.

Trump is coming to power at a dark time in the world. Last March, Secretary of State John Kerry [declared](#) that the ethnic cleansing of Christian, Yazidi, and Shia Muslim communities by ISIS forces amounts to nothing less than genocide. That same week, Congress voted unanimously in favor of classifying the atrocities as genocidal.

And yet even after acknowledging that entire communities are being systematically murdered en masse, no one has been able to stop the massacres.

This is not the first time a US president-elect has confronted such stakes. In 2008, a NY Times [editorial](#) urged then President-elect Obama to take practical steps to prevent new instances of genocide. Unfortunately, we failed then -- and we are failing now.

The current systematic murdering, torture, enslavement, kidnapping, raping and persecution of religious and ethnic minorities in territories dominated by the Islamic State constitutes the very same type of evil that we like to comfortably pretend is confined to only history books. Each time a power-crazed fanatic group is finally beaten down, we view the remains and repeat the promise of "Never Again" articulated at the Nuremberg Tribunal of 1946.

And each time, we break that promise anew by waiting too long and not working hard enough at our commitment to prevent genocide or crimes against humanity.

Labeling is far from enough, but it is an important first step. Because once we recognize something as genocide, America and other leading nations are then obligated to act.

The US has ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article I of which establishes a duty for contracting states to "prevent and to punish" genocide, and Article 8 of which states that such countries "may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action" as "appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide."

If soon-to-be-President Trump wants, as he has previously stated, to prosecute criminals, then let him hold these genocidal war criminals responsible for their actions. If, as he claims, he wants to take a firm stand against Islamic terrorism, let him take action in a realm where every day matters, where every hour can mean the difference between life and death for innocent men, women, and children.

If his incoming administration is frustrated with the international community's status quo, let them break out of the cycle of weak resolutions and empty statements and take seriously the US stake in the "responsibility to protect," a political commitment unanimously adopted by all members of the United Nations General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit.

It says that, "If a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations."

Fundamentally, this is not about politics; it is about making a commitment to save people's lives. In 2016, the American Center for Law and Justice, a Christian-based organization that advocates for constitutional and human rights, published a 7-point plan to stop the ISIS genocide against Christians which can be applied in any instance in which the US recognizes that a genocide is taking place.

These practical steps for governmental intervention include calling upon the various UN organs to formally recognize the genocides taking place, to prosecute war criminals and to establish in-region safe zones for genocide victims, which would also eliminate the need for mass refugee relocation.

We urge President-elect Trump to seriously consider these and other practical suggestions.

After a bitter election season, the American people are understandably having a hard time trying to get past their domestic differences. But to paraphrase Saint-Exupéry, national unity will not come from always seeing eye to eye, but from looking outward together in the same direction.

Stopping genocide around the world could and should serve as a unifying call to action, and a request for every American, including both the President-elect and his opponents, to turn their powerful gazes outwards. Regardless of party affiliation, we must all look back at our failures over the last hundred years and look ahead with a unified vision for a more humane century.

Our collective political energy could best be spent saving lives, and the incoming leader of the free world must immediately commit to doing his part.

Church destroyed in suspected Islamic State night attack in Syria border town

Barnabas Fund (21.07.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2bvA7pd> - On the night of Monday 18 July gunmen opened fire on a church in Qamishli in the far north-east of Syria before detonating explosives inside the building. "The church was completely destroyed, you can see only ashes here," an eyewitness told local press. The attackers stole offering boxes from the church before blowing up the building. Militants from Islamic State (IS) are suspected of carrying out the attack.

Qamishli was already home to a substantial Christian minority before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, and has increasingly become a refuge for Christians, with another surge of newly displaced believers arriving since Islamic State's capture last month of parts of the town of Hassake, which is 50 miles to the south of Qamishli. The security situation is extremely fragile, as control of the town is divided between Kurdish militia and Syrian government forces, who agreed an uneasy truce in April, whilst Islamic State controls territory to the south of Qamishli. In June, an IS suicide bomber killed two Christians in a failed attempt to assassinate Patriarch Aphrem II, the head of the Syriac Orthodox Church, and Christians have also been the targets of multiple suicide and grenade attacks by IS militants. In a particularly cynical attack, IS detonated bombs in three Christian-owned restaurants on the night of 30 December, killing 16 people and injuring over 30 others.

Christian man forced to convert to Islam in Raqqa, Syria, when unable to continue paying jizya tax to Islamic State (IS)

Barnabas Fund (24.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/29ynd5H> - Among the few Christian families left in Raqqa, the de facto capital in Syria of Islamic State (IS), an elderly Christian man has converted to Islam, as he no longer had the financial resources to pay the jizya tax.

The militant group posted a video of a man identifying himself as Mostafa Abu Alzer reciting the "Shahada" (the Islamic creed, recitation of which is considered conversion to Islam) and stating that he willingly converted to Islam.

Raqqa was captured by rebel forces in March 2013 and came under the complete control of IS in January 2014. When IS took control, they faced Christians with the options of converting to Islam, paying jizya tax as a sign of subjugation to Muslim rule, or death. Most Christians chose instead to flee but Abu Alzer, wanting to protect his home, opted to stay and pay the jizya tax. A small number of other Christians made the same choice. In March of this year, IS issued an edict forbidding anyone from leaving Raqqa. As a result Abu Alzer could not flee when he ran out of money to pay jizya. He was left with the choice of death or conversion. It is notable how few Christians in Syria or Iraq have converted to Islam despite the very severe persecution they face from Islamic State and other Islamist groups. Many, including some in Raqqa, have chosen martyrdom rather than denying Christ.

According to Raqqa Is Being Silently Slaughtered (RBSS), an activist group founded by former journalists, there are around 25 Christian families still living in the city.

Jizya is a tax paid by non-Muslims after signing a dhimma contract. Under this contract, non-Muslims who live in a Muslim state are allowed to live as long as they pay the tax and keep to various humiliating regulations which effectively forces them to live as non-citizens. They are then referred to as dhimmis. Historically most dhimmis have not been required to actually sign a dhimma contract - it has just been imposed on them - though IS has forced Christians to actually sign it.

The concept of jizya is based directly on the Qur'an (Q 9:29):

"Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled."

The rules imposed on Christians by IS in Raqqa, and all areas they control, are almost identical to the list of rules imposed by classical Islam on dhimmi. This includes not been allowed to build churches and other Christian buildings, nor publically pray, worship and use the Bible. The public display of Christian symbolism, like a cross, is also forbidden, they must respect Muslims and not criticise them, and Christians are not allowed to defend themselves. Anyone who breaks even one rule is considered to have forfeited the protection of the contract and is treated as an enemy of Islam who can be immediately executed.

Patriarch and other church leaders escape assassination attempt as suicide bomber kills three bodyguards, injures many

Barnabas Fund (24.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/29NZSjW> - Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II, together with accompanying senior leaders of the Syriac Orthodox Church, survived an assassination attempt on Sunday 19 June. A suicide bomber disguised as a priest tried to infiltrate a church service in the small Syrian town of Qamishli, where Christians had gathered to commemorate the Assyrian genocide, which they call "Seyfo" (meaning "Sword"). The genocide, in which some 3.5 million Christians, mainly Armenians and Assyrians, perished under Turkish Ottoman rule, peaked in 1915 and is commemorated by Assyrian Christians annually. Ethnic Assyrians are the indigenous Christian people of

the region, and belong to a variety of denominations, including the Syriac Orthodox Church. Christians in Syria told a Barnabas contact that one of the worshippers gathered at the church alerted the Patriarch's bodyguards when she realised the stranger was not from the Syriac Church nor even Assyrian. Unable to reach his intended target and blocked by members of the Assyrian Christians' own "Sotero" (meaning "Protect") security personnel, the man detonated his explosives, killing two bodyguards and injuring scores of other believers.

ISIS genocide against 'People of the Book' — How long will Kerry continue to talk around it?

By Nina Shea, National Review (16.03.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1pvKo8T> - For five months, the State Department has indicated that Iraq's Yazidi community should be declared a target of ISIS genocide but meanwhile has been less sure about ISIS's intentions toward Middle East Christians. Tomorrow is Secretary John Kerry's congressional deadline for officially determining whether Christians, along with the Yazidis and possibly others, face genocide by ISIS. Insisting that department lawyers need a little more time to struggle with the evidence, Kerry promises his decision soon, if not this week.

This shouldn't be a hard case. Few groups have publicized their brutality toward Christians in real time and in technicolor as ISIS has. Christians, among others, have been declared genocide victims by Pope Francis, the EU Parliament, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and the U.S. House of Representatives, in a bipartisan, unanimous vote on March 14, in the heat of election season.

All along, the State Department has demonstrated that it is not just being abundantly cautious and slow in ruling that the atrocities against Christians is genocide but that it is simply unwilling to use that designation specifically for Christians. Rather than carefully reviewing the evidence, as it claims, it has ignored it.

For months, State officials claimed they lacked facts about the Christians and then did nothing about it. Rather than follow the precedent of Secretary Colin Powell, who collected evidence for determining genocide in Darfur, Kerry refrained from dispatching fact finders in the case of the Middle Eastern Christians. When some 30 Christian leaders wrote on December 4 to request an opportunity to brief Kerry, he failed to answer. With only a month remaining until its March deadline, State Department officials asked the Knights of Columbus, which had been running TV spots on the Christian genocide, to prepare a written report of the facts. Before it was even completed, those same officials, meeting with Iraqi Chaldean Catholic leaders, told them that a genocide determination for Iraqi Christians was not in the offing. State suggested that terms such as "persecution," "ethnic cleansing," or "crimes against humanity" — terms that carry less moral and legal weight — be used instead.

The Knights on March 9 presented their weighty, 300-page report, based in part on a fact-finding mission that used the Darfur fact-finders' questionnaire. The Knights list over a thousand instances of ISIS's deliberately massacring, killing, torturing, enslaving, kidnapping, or raping Christians. This catalogue of horrors, however, may still not be enough.

Genocide is a crime of intent, and State Department officials, overlooking such ISIS declarations as "We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women," have had trouble determining whether ISIS aims to destroy all or part of the Christian communities in its territory and is thereby committing genocide as defined in the United Nations' Genocide Convention. State's troubles may be explained in part by its reliance on a 30-page trip report of the Holocaust Museum's office of genocide

prevention. That report finds that ISIS, far from intending to destroy Iraqi and Syrian Christian communities, respects them as "People of the Book," and seeks to peacefully coexist with them.

The report takes at face value ISIS's claims of a *jizya* option, as does the State Department in its annual religious-freedom report for 2015. The museum report uncritically asserts that "ISIS specifically notes that its treatment of the Yazidis differs from its treatment of *ahl al kitab*, the 'people of the book,' Christians and Jews, who had the option of paying the *jizya* (tax) to avoid conversion or death."

The museum report repeats such ISIS claims and lets them stand unchallenged. Purporting to quote ISIS fighters on why they reject a Mosul Christian's attempt to stay and pay the *jizya* — "we wanted to meet with your priests and they said no" — the report neglects to give the Church's side of the story. It gives the impression that ISIS gave Iraq's Christians a reasonable deal but that Christian leaders refused it and therefore have themselves to blame.

That conclusion is reinforced in another passage in the museum report: "It is unknown whether Christians who were given the option to pay a *jizya* or leave, instead of convert or face death, would still be given this option should they return now." This speculation, of course, is preposterous. ISIS doesn't respect Christians. It beheads or enslaves them. The museum report is compromised by its failure ever to present the viewpoint of Christian leaders.

Nineveh, Iraq

In fact, Mosul clergy who had direct engagement with ISIS in July 2014 state that there was no serious option for Nineveh's Christians to pay *jizya* to avoid worse consequences. Archbishop Yohanna Mushi of the Syriac Catholic Church, the largest church in Nineveh, writes that the Christians of northern Iraq determined they "can never trust Daesh [ISIS] no matter how many good intentions they try to show." This is not Islamophobia: The Christian *jizya* issue aside, the State Department, of course, does not trust ISIS either.

Emanuel Adelkello, a Syrian Catholic priest who dealt directly with ISIS over the fate of the 1,000 Christians still in Mosul in late July 2014, wrote to me details about the "*jizya* option." He relates that ISIS demanded all remaining adult Christian men to gather at a Mosul community center, purportedly to hear ISIS's *jizya* announcement. After the Christian leaders consulted among themselves, they decided it would be unwise to go. Father Emanuel explained that they feared that either they were being rounded up for slaughter or that the Christian women and girls would be jeopardized should their people remain under ISIS's "protection." In the priest's words:

The collective belief was that this gathering was not an attempt to negotiate, it was only going to be a demand at best, and a trap at worst. The Christians mostly believed they would likely be killed if they showed up. At the appointed time, no Christians showed up. Angered, ISIS then gave them two choices, leave or be killed. . . . [*Jizya*] was only put forward initially as a ploy from which ISIS could keep the Christians there to further take advantage of them and abuse them. There was specific concern that the intention was to keep women there so that they could be taken freely by the ISIS fighters. The ISIS fighters had made public statements that according to the Koran it was their right to take the Christian women as they pleased.

Their concerns were soon to be validated. Within weeks, two dozen Christian women and girls who had remained in Nineveh were captured as ISIS sex slaves. They have yet to be freed. In August, thousands of Yazidis were also captured. On October 16, 2014, the Islamic State's treasury department released an official price list for the sale of Christian as well as Yazidi females. Girls one to seven years old were the priciest, at \$200.

This price list was found authentic by Zainab Bangura, the U.N.'s special representative for sexual violence in conflict.

Reports about the Christians who stayed behind in Nineveh after ISIS took control in the summer of 2014 also provide critical evidence. Iraqi Christian parliamentarian Yonadam Kanna reports that a dozen or so Christian families who remained in Mosul, largely because of disabilities or old age, were forced to convert to Islam. *World* magazine editor Mindy Belz, who interviewed Christian survivors in Nineveh, writes in her new book *They Say We Are Infidels* that, in the major Christian city of Qaraqosh, some 100 Christians who were initially left behind were held hostage in their homes. "One father described being tortured," she relates, "while his wife and two children were threatened after the family refused to deny their faith."

Another Nineveh family had their three-year-old daughter, Christina Noah, taken from them by ISIS militants. According to a cell-phone call from Rita, a 25-year-old Christian woman who also failed to escape, both she and Christina were detained in a holding pen with other women and girls and waiting to be sold at a Mosul slave market, as reported in the *New York Times*. Archbishop Moshi states that in all, over 20 Christians, aged mostly between 40 and 70, were captured and haven't been seen since, despite ransom offers from the Church.

One 80-year-old Nineveh Christian woman who stayed was reportedly burned alive last May. In another Christian family, the mother and twelve-year-old daughter were raped by ISIS militants, leading the father, who was forced to watch, to commit suicide. A Christian refugee told Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, now the archbishop emeritus of Washington, that she witnessed ISIS crucify her husband on the door of their home.

In September 2014, a family of twelve Assyrian Christians, trapped in their Nineveh hometown of Bartella after ISIS swept in a month earlier, escaped after being forcibly converted to Islam. A coreligionist who refused to renounce his faith was badly beaten, tied up, and taken off in a truck to, as they concluded, be killed.

The small numbers of Nineveh Christians remaining live as indigents or captives, or both.

Syria

Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, the former counterterrorism coordinator in the State Department under Kerry, has determined that ISIS's jizya option is a "Salafi Caliphate publicity stunt." It aims to make its leader appear more caliph-like. Fernandez wrote about the jizya option in Raqqa:

After burning Christian books, destroying churches, and kidnapping priests in Raqqa in 2013, ISIS then publicized, in February 2014, a new dhimmi pact [to pay a jizya tax] with Christians in Raqqa State. The announcement received considerable attention in international media, but there is little evidence that there was much of a Christian community to form the pact with. Although the agreement includes the standard language of "not building a church, monastery or monk's hermitage," there is no evidence that any existing churches actually remained open or in Christian hands, much less that anyone would want to build any. Indeed, there are no images whatsoever of what could be described as normal Christian life in ISIS-controlled territory — no functioning churches, no monasteries or working priests, and no Christian families or Christian schools — all of which had existed throughout Islamic history.

ISIS defectors report that the rape of Christian female "infidels" in Raqqa was common and approved by the ISIS sharia court. Some were twelve years old. The last young person to leave Raqqa reported that he had to pay "jizya" but lived in "constant fear" and had to conform to Muslim dress and customs, even to shout "Allahu akbar" along with

mobs, and had no possibility of going to church. No more than a dozen or two elderly Christians are left in Raqqa.

Over the past year, ISIS abducted some 500 Christians from the Syrian town of Qarayatain and from villages in the Khabur River valley. In both cases, Islamic State sharia courts ordered church patriarchs to pay the Islamic tax levied for non-Muslims, but it's impossible to see these as anything but hostage-for-ransom cases. From the Khabur group, three men dressed in orange jumpsuits were killed in an ISIS video, and the rest were eventually freed, after the Assyrian Church paid part of the \$23 million that ISIS demanded. Archbishop Jean Kawak of the Syriac Orthodox Church states that the Qarayatain Christians are being "treated like slaves" and continue to be held there against their will.

In every known case where ISIS uses the term "jizya," the Christian payments are clearly ransom or extortion. Permission to perform Christian "rites" is traditionally purported to follow from jizya, but in no known case does ISIS honor it. ISIS's demands for jizya are typically accompanied by atrocities. There is no functioning church, no Christian clergy, no Christian liturgies or sacraments, and no intact Christian community anywhere under the Islamic State.

Genocide is the "crime of crimes." Representative Jeff Fortenberry (R., Neb.), who along with Representative Anna Eshoo (D., Calif.) introduced the House genocide resolution, remarked that it is important to address "the scandal of silence and indifference about ISIS' targeted and systematic destruction of these endangered communities." It is urgent that the Obama administration recognize that Christians too are among the victims of ISIS genocide and, along with Yazidis, extremely vulnerable. You can help by signing [this petition](#).

Knights of Columbus report: ISIS committing Christian 'genocide'

Full report with pictures (280 pages):

<http://www.stopthechristiengenocide.org/en/report-photos.html>

By Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service (10.03.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1Ro6sYW> - The Knights of Columbus has issued a 280-page report declaring that the Islamic State group is committing "genocide" against Christians and other religious groups in the Middle East and urging the U.S. State Department to use that term to describe its actions.

Knights of Columbus CEO Carl Anderson said his Catholic fraternal organization, working in partnership with the group In Defense of Christians, does not contend Christians alone are facing genocide from the group known as ISIS but it believes the State Department must include them.

"The United States government should not exclude Christians from such a finding," he said at a news conference Thursday (March 10). "Doing so simply would be contrary to the facts."

At the request of senior State Department officials, the Knights of Columbus issued the report detailing how Christians have been the victims of killings, kidnappings, rapes and destruction of religious property. It included a list of 1,131 Christians killed in Iraq between 2003 and 2014, and 125 churches attacked there in the same period.

Gregory Stanton, president of Genocide Watch, joined Anderson on a panel of experts supporting the findings of the report and the use of the word "genocide."

"The truth is, the word's moral force is the reason for this word to be used," said Stanton, the former president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

Nina Shea, a religious freedom expert at the Hudson Institute, called the report the "largest compilation in existence of what has happened to Christians in the path of ISIS."

In response to a question from RNS, a State Department official, who was not authorized to be identified by name, said, "Regardless of whether Da'esh's conduct satisfies certain legal definitions, including genocide and crimes against humanity, the United States has been clear that our interest in accountability for perpetrators remains undiminished."

European Parliament resolution on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' (2016/2529(RSP))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to its previous resolutions of 27 February 2014 on the situation in Iraq⁽¹⁾, of 18 September 2014 on the situation in Iraq and Syria, and the IS offensive, including the persecution of minorities⁽²⁾, in particular paragraph 4 thereof, of 27 November 2014 on Iraq: kidnapping and mistreatment of women⁽³⁾, of 12 February 2015 on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria, in particular in the IS context⁽⁴⁾, and specifically paragraph 27 thereof, of 12 March 2015 on recent attacks and abductions by ISIS/Daesh in the Middle East, notably of Assyrians⁽⁵⁾, in particular paragraph 2 thereof, of 12 March 2015 on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2013 and the European Union's policy on the matter⁽⁶⁾, in particular paragraphs 129 and 211 thereof, of 12 March 2015 on the EU's priorities for the UN Human Rights Council in 2015⁽⁷⁾, in particular paragraphs 66 and 67 thereof, of 30 April 2015 on the persecution of Christians around the world, in relation to the killing of students in Kenya by terror group Al-Shabaab⁽⁸⁾, in particular paragraph 10 thereof, and of 30 April 2015 on the destruction of cultural sites perpetrated by ISIS/Daesh⁽⁹⁾,

– having regard to its recommendation to the Council of 18 April 2013 on the UN principle of the 'Responsibility to Protect' ('R2P')⁽¹⁰⁾,

– having regard to the Council conclusions of 16 March 2015 on the EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Daesh threat, of 20 October 2014 on the ISIL/Daesh crisis in Syria and Iraq, of 30 August 2014 on Iraq and Syria, of 14 April 2014 and 12 October 2015 on Syria, and of 15 August 2014 on Iraq,

– having regard to Council Decision 2003/335/JHA of 8 May 2003 on the investigation and prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes⁽¹¹⁾;

– having regard to: the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief; the EU Guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law; the EU guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them; the guidelines for EU policy towards third countries on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment; the EU Guidelines on children and armed conflict; the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child; and the EU Human Rights Guidelines on freedom of expression online and offline; and the EU Guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons,

- having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) on Iraq and Syria,
- having regard to Resolution 2091 (2016) Foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 27 January 2016,
- having regard to the statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, of 25 August 2014 on 'Iraqi civilians suffering "horrific" widespread and systematic persecution',
- having regard to the recent UN Security Council resolutions on Iraq and Syria, in particular Resolution 2249 (2015) condemning recent terrorists attacks by ISIS and Resolution 2254 (2015), endorsing a road map for the peace process in Syria and setting a timetable for talks,
- having regard to Resolution S-22/1 adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 'The human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups', of 3 September 2014,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
- having regard to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief of 1981,
- having regard to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984,
- having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 9 December 1948,
- having regard to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in particular Articles 5 to 8 thereof,
- having regard to the Analysis Framework by the Office of the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG),
- having regard to the statement of 12 August 2014 by the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect on the situation in Iraq,
- having regard to the Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups, of 27 March 2015, in particular paragraph 16 thereof on 'Violations Perpetrated by ISIL – Attacks against religious and ethnic groups',
- having regard to the statement of 13 October 2015 by the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect on the escalation of incitement to violence in Syria on religious grounds,
- having regard to the Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, presented in the Human Rights Council on 13 August 2015, in particular paragraphs 165 to 173 thereof,
- having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas, as recognised by UN Security Council Resolution 2249 (2015), the violent extremist ideology of the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh', its terrorist acts, its continued gross systematic and widespread attacks directed against civilians, abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, including those perpetrated on religious or ethnic grounds, and its eradication of cultural heritage and trafficking of cultural property constitute a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security;

B. whereas religious and ethnic minorities, such as Christian (Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian, Melkite and Armenian), Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak, Kaka'i, Sabae-Mandean, Kurdish and Shi'a communities, as well as many Arabs and Sunni Muslims, have been targeted by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'; whereas many have been killed, slaughtered, beaten, subjected to extortion, abducted and tortured; whereas they have been enslaved (in particular women and girls, who have also been subjected to other forms of sexual violence) and forcibly converted, and have been victims of forced marriage and trafficking in human beings; whereas children have also been forcibly recruited; whereas mosques, monuments, shrines, churches and other places of worship, tombs and cemeteries have been vandalised;

C. whereas genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, wherever and whenever they happen, must not go unpunished, and whereas their effective prosecution must be ensured by taking measures at national level, by enhancing international cooperation and through the International Criminal Court and international criminal justice;

D. whereas genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are of concern to all EU Member States, which are determined to cooperate with a view to preventing such crimes and putting an end to the impunity of their perpetrators, in accordance with Council Common Position 2003/444/CFSP of 16 June 2003;

E. whereas UN Security Council Resolution 2249 (2015) authorises those member states that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law, in particular with the United Nations Charter, and with international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, on the territory under the control of the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh', in Syria and Iraq, to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts;

F. whereas the international legal definition of genocide, in accordance with Article II of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, includes the words: 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) forcibly transferring children of one group to another group'; whereas Article III of that Convention considers punishable not only genocide, but conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, and complicity in genocide;

G. whereas since 2014 an estimated 5 000 Yazidis have been killed, while many others have been tortured or forcibly converted to Islam; whereas at least 2 000 Yazidi women have been enslaved, and made victims of forced marriage and trafficking; whereas girls as young as six have been raped and Yazidi children have been forcibly recruited as soldiers for the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'; whereas there is clear evidence of mass graves of Yazidi people abducted by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh';

H. whereas on the night of 6 August 2014 more than 150 000 Christians fled the advance of the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' over Mosul, Qaraqosh and other villages in the Nineveh Plains, having been robbed of all their belongings, and whereas to date they

remain displaced and in precarious conditions in northern Iraq; whereas the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' captured those who were unable to flee from Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, and whereas non-Muslim women and children were enslaved, with some being sold and others brutally killed and filmed by the perpetrators;

I. whereas in February 2015 the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' kidnapped more than 220 Assyrian Christians after overrunning several farming communities on the southern bank of the Khabur river in the north-eastern province of Hassakeh, and whereas to date only a few have been released, while the fate of the others remains unknown;

J. whereas several reports by UN bodies, including the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, have stated that acts committed by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide;

K. whereas the International Independent Commission of Inquiry has documented and reported that persons from ethnic and religious minorities opposing the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' and other terrorist groups, militias and non-state armed groups in areas under their de facto control continue to be persecuted;

L. whereas, according to the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) principles, when a state (or non-state actor) manifestly fails to protect its population or is in fact a perpetrator of such crimes, the international community has a responsibility to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the UN Charter;

M. whereas under international law each individual has the right to live according to his or her conscience and to freely hold and change religious and non-religious beliefs; whereas political and religious leaders have a duty at all levels to combat extremism and to promote mutual respect among individuals and religious groups;

1. Recalls its strong condemnation of the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' and its egregious human rights abuses, which amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes, within the meaning of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and that action should be taken for it to be recognised as genocide by the UN Security Council; is extremely concerned at this terrorist group's deliberate targeting of Christians (Chaldeans/ Syriacs/Assyrians, Melkites, Armenians), Yazidis, Turkmens, Shi'ites, Shabaks, Sabians, Kaka'i and Sunnis who do not agree with their interpretation of Islam, as part of its attempts to exterminate any religious and ethnic minorities from the areas under its control;

2. Expresses its view that the persecution, atrocities and international crimes amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity; stresses that the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' is committing genocide against Christians and Yazidis, and other religious and ethnic minorities, who do not agree with the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' interpretation of Islam, and that this therefore entails action under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; underlines the fact that those who intentionally, for ethnic or religious reasons, conspire in, plan, incite, commit or attempt to commit, are complicit in or support atrocities should be brought to justice and prosecuted for violations of international law, notably war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide;

3. Urges each of the Contracting Parties to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, signed at Paris on 9 December 1948, and to other relevant international agreements, in particular the EU Member States, to prevent war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide within their territory; urges Syria and Iraq to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court;

4. Urges the members of the UN Security Council to support a referral by the Security Council to the International Criminal Court in order to investigate violations committed in Iraq and Syria by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' against Christians, Yazidis and religious and ethnic minorities;

5. Urges each of the Contracting Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, of 1948, and to other international agreements for the prevention and punishment of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and in particular the competent authorities of countries – and their nationals – which are in any way supporting, cooperating in or funding, or are complicit in, these crimes, to wholly fulfil their legal obligations under the convention and such other international agreements;

6. Urges the competent authorities of those countries which are in any way directly or indirectly supporting, cooperating in or funding, or are complicit in, these war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, to wholly fulfil their legal obligations under international law and to stop these unacceptable behaviours, which are causing enormous damage to the Iraqi and Syrian societies and are seriously destabilising neighbouring countries and international peace and security;

7. Recalls that UN Security Council Resolution 2253 imposed a legal duty on UN member states to prohibit any kind of assistance to the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' and other terrorist organisations, notably supplying arms and financial assistance, including the illegal oil trade, and urges them to make this kind of assistance a crime under domestic law; recalls that failure to act in consequence by some member states would constitute a violation of international law and endow other member states with a legal duty to implement the UN Security Council resolution by acting to bring the responsible individuals and entities to justice;

8. Denounces in the strongest terms the destruction of religious and cultural sites and artefacts by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh', which constitutes an attack against the cultural heritage of all inhabitants of Syria and Iraq and of humanity at large; calls on all states to step up their criminal investigations and judicial cooperation with a view to identifying all groups responsible for illicit trafficking in cultural goods and for damaging or destroying cultural heritage that belongs to all of humanity in Syria, Iraq and the broader Middle East and North African regions;

9. Urges all the countries of the international community, including the EU Member States, to work actively on fighting radicalisation and to improve their legal and jurisdictional systems in order to avoid their nationals and citizens being able to travel to join the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' and participate in violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and to ensure that, should they do so, they are criminally prosecuted as soon as possible, including for online incitement and support to commit those crimes;

10. Calls for the EU to establish a permanent Special Representative for Freedom of Religion and Belief;

11. Recognises, supports and demands respect by all for the inalienable right of all ethnic and religious minorities, and others, living in Iraq and Syria, to continue to live in their historical and traditional homelands in dignity, equality and safety, and to fully practise their religion and beliefs freely without being subject to any kind of coercion, violence or discrimination; believes that, in order to stem the suffering and the mass exodus of Christians, Yazidis and other communities of the region, a clear and unequivocal statement by all regional political and religious leaders in support of their continued presence and full and equal rights as citizens of their home countries is imperative;

12. Requests the international community and its member states, including the EU and its Member States, to ensure the necessary security conditions and prospects for all those who have been forced to leave their homeland or have been forcibly displaced, to make effective as soon as possible their right to return to their homelands, to preserve their homes, land, property and belongings, as well as their churches and religious and cultural sites, and to be able to have a dignified life and future;

13. Recognises that the ongoing persecution of religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East is a factor that contributes to mass migration and internal displacement;

14. Stresses the importance of the international community providing protection and aid, including military protection and aid, in accordance with international law, to all those targeted by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh' and other terrorist organisations in the Middle East, such as ethnic and religious minorities, and of such people's participation in future political lasting solutions; calls on all parties involved in the conflict to respect universal human rights and to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid and assistance through all possible channels; calls for the creation of humanitarian corridors; considers that safe havens, protected by UN-mandated forces, could be part of the answer to the massive challenge of providing temporary protection for millions of refugees from the conflict in Syria and Iraq;

15. Reaffirms its full and active support for international diplomatic efforts and the work of UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura aimed at launching peace negotiations in Geneva between all Syrian parties, with the participation of all the relevant global and regional players, in the coming days, as well as his proposals for local ceasefires; calls for the EU and the international community to put pressure on all donors to fulfil their promises and to fully commit themselves to providing financial support for the host countries, especially ahead of the Syria donors' conference in London on 4 February 2016;

16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Syria, the Government and Council of Representatives of Iraq, the Regional Government of Kurdistan, the institutions of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC), the United Nations Secretary-General, the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council.

(1) Texts adopted, **P8_TA(2014)0011**.

(2) Texts adopted, **P8_TA(2014)0027**.

(3) Texts adopted, **P8_TA(2014)0066**.

(4) Texts adopted, **P8_TA(2015)0040**.

(5) Texts adopted, **P8_TA(2015)0071**.

(6) Texts adopted, **P8_TA(2015)0076**.

(7) Texts adopted, [P8_TA\(2015\)0079](#).

(8) Texts adopted, [P8_TA\(2015\)0178](#).

(9) Texts adopted, [P8_TA\(2015\)0179](#).

(10) Texts adopted, [P7_TA\(2013\)0180](#).

(11) OJ L 118, 14.5.2003, p. 12.

EPRID's Statement on the European Parliament resolution on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'

EPRID (19.02.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1OpLpmV> - The European Platform against Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID) welcomes the recent European Parliament resolution on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'.

MEPs from each of the main political groups reiterated their strong condemnation of ISIS/Daesh and its egregious human rights abuses, deliberately targeting Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Shi'ites, Shabak, Sabeans, Kaka'e and Sunnis who do not agree with their interpretation of Islam. These violations amount to "war crimes", "crimes against humanity" and "genocide" according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), they added. Hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children are suffering at the hands of ISIS.

EPRID believes that this resolution, as well as the resolution by the PACE of the Council of Europe, is a significant step forward that will help the international community to determine the specific nature of these crimes and, ultimately facilitate adequate responses, including the investigation and prosecution of those who are responsible, and redress for victims.

EPRID also welcomes the call for the EU to establish a permanent Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief and joins the European Parliament in urging each country of the world to prevent persecution, discrimination and intolerance on grounds of religion or belief, as well as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide within their territories.

Living as a Christian in the Islamic State

When John, a Syrian Christian, chose to stay in Raqqa after Islamic State took control of the city in 2014, he had no idea how he would survive. Thousands abandoned the city, believing it better to save their lives than live at the centre of the Islamists' new "caliphate". John survived in Raqqa for 18 months before escaping in the middle of the night. He told World Watch Monitor about a life of frequent harassment, witnessing weekly executions, and the sadness of ordinary Syrians who welcomed Islamic State fighters at first, but grew to regret giving them their support.

World Watch Monitor (18.02.2016) - John stood watching on the pavement, as Islamic State fighters entered Raqqa in their tanks and military vehicles. He was part of the crowd at the first beheading, and saw for the first time his mother and sister wear Islamic dress. John and his father signed the *jizya* document – an annual tax paid to IS, allowing non-Muslims to continue living as Christians in the so-called "caliphate".

John is in his early 20s. He can't say his real name, what he is studying, or in what type of business his parents were involved.

"Life in Raqqa carries on as usual in many ways. Shops and restaurants are open. There is food, electricity, and water. People are more fortunate than those living in a city like Aleppo."

"But you're constantly alert, never looking into someone's eyes when walking on the street; always aware of what to say and not to say."

Islamic State troops won the battle for Raqqa in January 2014. After a week of intense fighting with other radical groups, they took control and declared it the capital of their caliphate.

"Before [IS won the battle] we had a scary week. We stayed in our house because everyone on the streets was being shot at."

John watched from the side-lines as the streets filled with people shouting "*Allahu Akbar*" (Allah is the greatest).

"I didn't shout it – I am a Christian. But when an IS man saw me being silent, he stopped the car. I had to say '*Allahu Akbar*' too."

"Many in Raqqa welcomed IS, but they all now regret it."

Soon people discovered that things had radically changed. IS started executing those they suspected to be supporters of the President or of having fought with other rebel groups against IS.

In the same week that Islamic State declared Raqqa their capital, they destroyed the interior of three churches.

"They broke everything inside – the icons, the altar, everything. One church building is now a centre for IS."

Nobody was forced to stay in the new caliphate, and many left. In some ways life returned to normal, John said, but it was soon clear that the city was under the control of IS. They changed the names of public buildings, "Islamic State" was printed on car number plates and the group banned the use of new bank notes printed by the Syrian government.

Soon after IS declared Raqqa their capital, Christians were told how they could live under IS rule.

"We could [convert and] become Muslims and live a normal life in Raqqa, we could leave, or we could stay and pay the *jizya* tax. The first year the tax was 54,000 Syrian pounds [about US\$300] per man – women and children are not 'taxed' – but last year the rate went up to 164,000 Syrian pounds per man."

The price of gold is used to calculate the *jizya*; in Islamic tradition it is 16 to 18 grams of gold per year per man.

John advised his parents to leave Raqqa, but they didn't want to abandon their home and business, and selling them was impossible. Even though many of the estimated 1,500 Christian families left, they stayed; at least it meant John could continue his studies.

John soon witnessed how IS dealt with those who didn't obey their rules.

"I saw a lot of cruelty. Every Friday they executed people. I was there when they beheaded the first man in public. They couldn't behead him with the first cut. He suffered so much they finally shot him."

John described how sick he felt when IS beheaded hundreds of soldiers from Raqqa's Syrian Army base and then pinned their heads on the fence he passed daily on his way to work. He felt IS soldiers were monsters, who could attack at any moment and for any reason.

"When I talked with them, I had to know what to say. A wrong word could offend them. Seeing all these atrocities, they don't seem like people, they seem like monsters to me, especially after what they did to those soldiers. This traumatised me. It was too much.

"IS hung their crosses from their ears when they put their heads on the fence. What shocked me too was that I saw people taking selfies with the heads. I believe they do this to scare people, to show them what happens when you do something wrong."

Despite the horrors he witnessed, John stayed in Raqqa because he wanted to work and continue his studies, and paying the *jizya* gave him some freedom.

"Because we paid the tax and had the declaration [confirming the tax was paid] always with us, no-one could harm us for being a Christian."

The protection was important because John had to deal with IS men every day.

"I met them at work, in the shops, even in the gym."

Only 50 Christian families left in Raqqa

It is remarkable how much John smiles when he talks about living in Raqqa.

"I got used to it. I think it has something to do with how we grew up as Christians; we're strong people, this helped us to stay. And, yes, you can live as a Christian in the Islamic State. No-one troubles you when you pay the tax."

However, John knows of only 50 Christian families left there. The only priest left as soon as IS took over. There is no church remaining – Christians visit each other for fellowship.

"I didn't see them mistreat Christians because of their faith. The only thing they did was to take the homes of Christians – and anyone else – who had left Raqqa, because their soldiers didn't have enough houses to live in.

"We never imagined this could happen. Christians in Raqqa were respected. It was a normal Syrian city with no radical Islamic population. In my opinion, what IS is doing isn't real Islam. I have lived with Muslims my whole life; we respected each other and lived peacefully together."

Some IS fighters were former Christians

Despite their cruelty, John said IS fighters were normal people.

"I could talk with them normally. It was only sometimes when they discovered that I was a Christian that they changed. They were sometimes funny. Once in the gym I heard them telling jokes, albeit about all the heads they had cut off. At different times we had conversations about me being a Christian. They advised me to become a Muslim. Once I was really shocked after talking with two of them. They turned out to be Armenians. They told me that they grew up in Christian families, that both of them had converted from Christianity to Islam. Their beards were not that long yet, they were quite new in IS. I later heard that one of them blew himself up as a suicide bomber.

"One day on a bus I met one of my old classmates. He was wearing IS clothes, had a long beard, and held a machine gun. He was convinced of the choice he had made, saying he wanted to fight for Islam and the Koran. Two weeks later he was killed in battle.

"I heard they send Syrian fighters to the frontlines; the foreigners have leadership positions. A week later the brother of this classmate also died fighting for IS. I know of one other friend of mine who joined IS. I don't know what happened to him."

'Western' haircut causes problems

There were moments when John was really afraid. An IS soldier once stopped him in the street and started shouting: "Why are you cutting your hair like this?" John showed him the paper declaring he was a Christian and that he had paid the tax, and the soldier left.

Another day, he was forced onto a bus because an IS soldier didn't like the jeans he was wearing or his haircut.

"We drove to an underground space where there were hundreds of other men. We were all divided up –first the elderly men were separated from the younger ones, then they separated young men with skinny jeans from the others. Then they separated a group based on their haircuts. I was in that group."

After the group had been reorganised, a Tunisian IS fighter made a passionate address to the men.

"He said: 'You are the new generation of Islamic youth. You look like Westerners and it appears you like them and their style, but they don't like you. People in the West hate you. Westerners are always working to get you away from Islam.'

"The ones with the skinny jeans then had to sign a document promising not to wear them anymore. Then our hair was completely shaved off and we were told to not sport this Western hairstyle anymore. I tried to explain that I was a Christian, but they didn't pay attention to that."

The changes in Raqqa were more radical for the women. All women, Muslim or not, have to cover themselves completely when they leave the house.

"It was hard for my mother and sister. They had to buy these clothes, which, of course, we didn't have at home," John said.

IS forbade advertising images that showed women not fully covered. Shampoo bottles, for example, which had images of women printed on them, had to be out of sight or removed completely. Regular checks were made.

"I remember a funny incident. A shopkeeper had a red balloon in the shape of a heart in his window. IS came in, screaming that this was a sin. The shopkeeper said it was just a balloon. The IS man insisted that this was sin because the shape could also be seen as a woman's breasts. The shopkeeper had to pop the balloon."

John learned how to respond to IS.

"One day an IS man heard my name mentioned and immediately understood that I was a Christian. I saw the expression on his face change. 'Are you an unbeliever?' he asked me. I replied: 'Don't you know this verse from the Koran that anyone who believes in God, in angels, in the books and in his prophets, in good and bad and in eternal life, is a believer?' He was shocked that I knew this verse from the Koran and he walked away."

Fleeing Raqqa in the middle of the night

It was because John couldn't continue his studies in Raqqa that he eventually left the city. As far as he knows, there are no other young Christians left.

"Of course it feels better. I might not have water and electricity every day as I did in Raqqa, but I feel safer; inside I have peace. In Raqqa there was this constant fear and alertness. Where I am living now, I don't have to be afraid of the people I meet in the streets."

John and a few others fled the city in secrecy.

"People could leave the city if it was justified. They could leave for medical treatment that wasn't available in Raqqa. I even heard of Christians who were allowed to go to another city to celebrate Christmas and New Year. I didn't have a reason, so I had to leave illegally."

He left Raqqa on a small bus with 15 others.

"I was so afraid that we would be stopped at an IS checkpoint. But that didn't happen. We took small roads, avoiding all the known checkpoints.

"After four hours, we arrived at a Syrian Army checkpoint. They welcomed us and then asked why we were so pale. We really had been very anxious. They checked our IDs, and gave us yoghurt. It was delicious."

John remains in contact with people who stayed in Raqqa. It isn't easy, but "there are ways", he said.

Asked about the attraction of joining Islamic State, John said he thinks many IS fighters were attracted by the high salaries paid at the beginning.

"I heard of 1,200 US dollars for a foreign fighter. If they had one or more wives, they would get 100 dollars per wife and 50 dollars per child. I saw them in shops with a lot of money, too much to spend.

"I think they are cheated. They really believe that what they do is right. They feel happy every time they kill someone. You can see this by how they go about executing people – every week finding a new way, even crucifying them. Thank God no Christians were executed for just being a Christian, but because they fought against the IS army."

Living under the Islamic State for 18 months didn't help John to understand why they needed to establish themselves in a new territory.

"They were already living in an Islamic country; in Syria the majority are Sunnis. They had their land but if they wanted to live under strict Islam they could have moved to Saudi Arabia."

John said he is willing to serve in the Syrian Army after finishing his studies.

"I don't want to run away. We have the right to take back our land. This is my country, not theirs. I am willing to fight for that."

Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia

The situation of Christians in the Middle East, religious freedom and interreligious dialogue at the heart of the Declaration

HRWF (15.02.2016) - On the occasion of their meeting in Havana (Cuba) on 12th February, Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia released a Joint Declaration in which a substantial part was devoted to the situation of Christians in the Middle East, religious freedom and interreligious dialogue:

"Our gaze must firstly turn to those regions of the world where Christians are victims of persecution. In many countries of the Middle East and North Africa whole families, villages and cities of our brothers and sisters in Christ are being completely exterminated. Their churches are being barbarously ravaged and looted, their sacred objects profaned, their monuments destroyed. It is with pain that we call to mind the situation in Syria, Iraq and other countries of the Middle East, and the massive exodus of Christians from the land in which our faith was first disseminated and in which they have lived since the time of the Apostles, together with other religious communities.

We call upon the international community to act urgently in order to prevent the further expulsion of Christians from the Middle East. In raising our voice in defence of persecuted Christians, we wish to express our compassion for the suffering experienced by the faithful of other religious traditions who have also become victims of civil war, chaos and terrorist violence.

Thousands of victims have already been claimed in the violence in Syria and Iraq, which has left many other millions without a home or means of sustenance. We urge the international community to seek an end to the violence and terrorism and, at the same time, to contribute through dialogue to a swift return to civil peace. Large-scale humanitarian aid must be assured to the afflicted populations and to the many refugees seeking safety in neighbouring lands.

We call upon all those whose influence can be brought to bear upon the destiny of those kidnapped, including the Metropolitans of Aleppo, Paul and John Ibrahim, who were taken in April 2013, to make every effort to ensure their prompt liberation.

We lift our prayers to Christ, the Saviour of the world, asking for the return of peace in the Middle East, "the fruit of justice" (Is 32:17), so that fraternal co-existence among the various populations, Churches and religions may be strengthened, enabling refugees to return to their homes, wounds to be healed, and the souls of the slain innocent to rest in peace.

We address, in a fervent appeal, all the parts that may be involved in the conflicts to demonstrate good will and to take part in the negotiating table. At the same time, the international community must undertake every possible effort to end terrorism through common, joint and coordinated action. We call on all the countries involved in the struggle against terrorism to responsible and prudent action. We exhort all Christians and all believers of God to pray fervently to the providential Creator of the world to protect His creation from destruction and not permit a new world war. In order to ensure a solid and enduring peace, specific efforts must be undertaken to rediscover the common values uniting us, based on the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We bow before the martyrdom of those who, at the cost of their own lives, have given witness to the truth of the Gospel, preferring death to the denial of Christ. We believe that these martyrs of our times, who belong to various Churches but who are united by their shared suffering, are a pledge of the unity of Christians. It is to you who suffer for Christ's sake that the word of the Apostle is directed: "Beloved ... rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly" (1 Pet 4:12-13).

Interreligious dialogue is indispensable in our disturbing times. Differences in the understanding of religious truths must not impede people of different faiths to live in peace and harmony. In our current context, religious leaders have the particular responsibility to educate their faithful in a spirit which is respectful of the convictions of those belonging to other religious traditions. Attempts to justify criminal acts with religious slogans are altogether unacceptable. No crime may be committed in God's name, "since God is not the God of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor 14:33).

In affirming the foremost value of religious freedom, we give thanks to God for the current unprecedented renewal of the Christian faith in Russia, as well as in many other countries of Eastern Europe, formerly dominated for decades by atheist regimes. Today, the chains of militant atheism have been broken and in many places Christians can now freely confess their faith. Thousands of new churches have been built over the last quarter of a century, as well as hundreds of monasteries and theological institutions. Christian communities undertake notable works in the fields of charitable aid and social development, providing diversified forms of assistance to the needy. Orthodox and Catholics often work side by side. Giving witness to the values of the Gospel they attest to the existence of the shared spiritual foundations of human co-existence.

At the same time, we are concerned about the situation in many countries in which Christians are increasingly confronted by restrictions to religious freedom, to the right to witness to one's convictions and to live in conformity with them. In particular, we observe that the transformation of some countries into secularized societies, estranged from all reference to God and to His truth, constitutes a grave threat to religious freedom. It is a source of concern for us that there is a current curtailment of the rights of Christians, if not their outright discrimination, when certain political forces, guided by an often very aggressive secularist ideology, seek to relegate them to the margins of public life."

(...)

Francis

Bishop of Rome
Pope of the Catholic Church

Kirill

Patriarch of Moscow
and all Russia

HRWF Footnote:

See the Resolution adopted by the Council of Europe Assembly on 27 January 2016:
<http://bit.ly/20x9DV5>

See the Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 4 February 2016
<http://bit.ly/1U2JXhw>

“We cannot ignore this genocide”

Until the murderous persecution of Christians by ISIS is recognised for what it is, its perpetrators cannot be brought to international justice

Catholic Herald (04.02.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1KsnaJQ> - Just before Christmas 75 parliamentarians, from both Houses and all parties – including the former head of our Armed Forces, the ex-head of MI5, and former cabinet ministers – wrote to David Cameron urging him to declare the atrocities being committed against Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq as genocide.

Poignantly, the letter, which I also signed, was delivered as the world commemorated the centenary of the Armenian genocide, in which between 800,000 and 1.5 million Armenian, Greek Orthodox and Assyrian Christians lost their lives. It is impossible not to see today’s events as anything other than a continuation of that shocking story.

I recently read Franz Werfel’s harrowing and prophetic novel The Forty Days of Musa Dagh, published in 1933. It was based on a true story about the Armenian genocide. His books were burnt by the Nazis and banned in Turkey, no doubt to try to assist in the process of collective amnesia. (In 1939, the eve of the Holocaust, Hitler famously asked: “Who now remembers the Armenians?”)

Werfel – a Jewish writer who converted to Catholicism and also wrote The Song of Bernadette – tells the story of several thousand Christians who took refuge on the mountain of Musa Dagh (Moses Mountain). The Armenians were a remnant who fought back against the genocide and, without the dramatic intervention of the French navy, would have perished on the mountain.

An Armenian priest, Fr Bezdikian, whose grandfather had been involved in the siege, later remarked: “Franz Werfel is the national hero of the Armenian people. His great book is a kind of consolation to us – no, not a consolation, there is no such thing – but it is of eminent importance to us that this book exists. It guarantees that it can never be forgotten, never, what happened to our people.”

But how quickly we did forget the massacres, rapes, robberies, forced labour, desecrations, and deportation on death marches of women, children, the elderly and infirm – all of which has an eerily and uncannily familiar ring to it today, as do the heartbreaking reports of Christian children starving to death.

In the same year that Werfel published *Musa Dagh*, and deeply affected by both the Armenian annihilation and the 1933 Simele massacre of Assyrian Christians in Iraq, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer, began to campaign for what he called an international law against barbarity. In 1943, during the Holocaust, when 49 of his own relatives had been murdered by the Nazis, Lemkin coined the word "genocide", combining the Greek word *genos*, ("family, tribe or race") and the Latin word *caedere* ("to kill").

In 1948, Lemkin went on to draft the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide which the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted on December 9 of that year.

The signatories declared that they would never again tolerate any "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

So is genocide what is happening today in Syria and Iraq – specifically to Christians and Yazidis? Pope Francis has said that it is – and so has Hillary Clinton, as well as Marco Rubio and most of the other Republican presidential hopefuls.

In our letter to the Prime Minister in December we said: "There is no doubt in our minds that the targeting of Christians and other religious minorities by Daesh [ISIS] falls within that definition." We urged the British Government to seek agreement at the United Nations that we should name things for what they are.

We insisted: "This is not simply a matter of semantics. There would be two main benefits from the acceptance by the UN that genocide is being perpetrated..." The first is that those responsible would one day face a day of judicial reckoning, and the second is that it would require the 147 states that have signed the convention to "face up to their duty to take the necessary action to 'prevent and punish' the perpetrators."

In response, the Foreign Office continues to trot out the tired old mantra: "It is a long-standing government policy that any judgments on whether genocide has occurred are a matter for the international judicial system rather than governments or other non-judicial bodies."

This is a frustrating and circular argument. Which international courts and judges should decide, on the basis of what process, and in considering what evidence? And what steps are the government actually taking to ensure that those courts do indeed urgently consider the matter and reach a conclusion?

If there isn't a process that we are willing to invoke at the UN, then the convention is just window-dressing and is an insult to the intention of the original drafters and ratifiers, as "never again" inevitably repeats itself over and over again.

To try to salve their consciences about this officials tell Parliament not to worry, because they are spending money "aimed at the prevention of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes".

But to what effect?

On the very day on which the Foreign Office issued that statement we learnt that ISIS had obliterated Mosul's ancient, stone-walled monastery of St Elijah, dating from the 6th century, where monks had etched the words Chi Rho, the first Greek letters of the word *Kristos*, "Christ".

This attempt to eradicate memory has been accompanied by the obliteration of Christ's followers. Last year 200 Assyrian Christians in the Khabur River Valley in Syria were

kidnapped. Jihadist websites showed graphic executions of some of the group, warning that others would be executed if the ransoms remained unpaid.

Last August the ancient St Eliane Monastery, founded more than 1,500 years ago in central Syria, was destroyed by ISIS – with dozens of Syriac Christians abducted, including Fr Jacques Mourad, abbot of the Syriac Catholic monastic community in Mar Musa. Held captive in Raqqa, he made a dramatic escape in disguise on a motorcycle several months later.

In Iraq, the Christian population has been devastated, with fewer than 300,000 Christians remaining – down from 1.4 million in 2003. Most of the remnant, from Nineveh, are struggling to survive in makeshift and intolerable conditions in Kurdistan.

And the fate of Syria's Christians has been catastrophic. How deplorable it would be if Syriac-Assyrian Christians were now denied a place at the putative peace talks.

Along with the Yazidi community, Christians have been told to convert or die. Children have been seized, propagandised and indoctrinated with jihadist ideology.

Nina Shea, director of the Centre for Religious Freedom, says that children are drip-fed with "school textbooks that direct children to hate and kill the Nazarenes, that is, the Christians, and the Yazidis, condemned as 'polytheists' and 'Devil worshippers' respectively". According to Shea and Canon Andrew White, the "Vicar of Baghdad", 30 Muslim teachers are believed to have been arrested for refusing to teach from these texts.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) said in a report last month that it believes ISIS is holding around 3,500 slaves, mostly women and children, as hostages and that Islamists have committed acts that "amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide".

The report says ISIS continues "to deliberately and wantonly loot and destroy places of religious and cultural significance" – anything which ISIS considers un-Islamic.

It added that ISIS "destroyed the Syrian orthodox al-Tahira church, in Mosul city, using bulldozers ... it reportedly used explosives to destroy the Syriac Orthodox church in al-Muhaniseen area, east of Mosul ... and removed historical inscriptions from the front of two churches – the Virgin Mary church and the Chaldean church – located in Doctor Street, central Mosul."

And of the people? "UNAMI/OHCHR continues to have grave concerns for the welfare and safety of those held in ISIL [ISIS] captivity."

On January 5, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, said that these "perpetrators of gross violations and abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law" must be "held accountable".

But what action is the UN taking to instigate this process of accountability?

Those who have been abducted have been targeted specifically because they are different; because of their ethnicity; because of their religion. If this is not genocide, what is?

Our failure to name this genocide for what it is was raised in a motion, tabled by Rob Ffello MP, last week in the House of Commons. The text rightly insists that "this

disgusting behaviour clearly falls within the definition of genocide as determined by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide”.

The motion – to which MPs can add their names – draws attention to the UN report, to the beheadings, crucifixions, shootings, burnings, other murders, torture, rape and extensive violence. It urges the British Government to ensure that “the provisions of the genocide convention are urgently, legitimately and effectively invoked and implemented”.

In the House of Lords I will be doing two things. First, on Wednesday, with Baroness Nicholson and Baroness Cox, I moved an amendment to the Immigration Bill, that victims of genocide should be given priority in asylum applications. This will be considered further in two weeks’ time. Secondly, I will be urging the Government to present the evidence of genocide to the UN – the names, the dates, the photographs of atrocities; the numbers killed, tortured, abducted or sold into sexual slavery; the accounts of forced conversions; the churches, shrines and manuscripts destroyed.

Why? So that those responsible are brought to justice.

We endlessly talk of something vaguely called “British values”. One value, one belief, that particularly marks us out from the ideology of ISIS is our belief in the rule of law.

As a signatory to the genocide convention, it is a dereliction of our duty to uphold international law if we do not take the action that should follow our signature, our voice and our military action.

Council of Europe assembly recognises that ISIS committed genocide

APPG (29.01.2016) - On January 27 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) adopted, almost unanimously, a resolution recognising that “individuals who act in the name of the terrorist entity which calls itself Da’ish” “have perpetrated acts of genocide and other serious crimes punishable under international law.” In this resolution, the Assembly continues “States should act on the presumption that Da’ish [i.e. ISIS] commits genocide and should be aware that this entails action under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” (§2). The Assembly also “recalls that under international law States have a positive obligation to prevent genocide, and thus should do their utmost to prevent their own nationals from taking part in such acts” (§ 3). The Assembly calls on its 47 Member States as well as on its observer and partner’s States (including Mediterranean States) to, inter alia, “fulfil their positive obligations under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide by taking all necessary measures to prevent genocide”.

See the resolution at: <http://bit.ly/20x9DV5>

The Genocide of Christians in the Middle East seen from Washington

IDC Prompts Hillary Clinton to Use 'G' Word at Townhall in New Hampshire

IDC/ In Defense of Christians (09.01.2016) - On December 31, 2015, In Defense of Christians (IDC) President Toufic Baaklini made the following statement:

"Yesterday evening at a town hall meeting, IDC New Hampshire supporter Father Andrew Nelson asked Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, 'Tonight, with all of us here, will you join those leaders, faith leaders and secular leaders and political leaders from both the right and the left, in calling what is happening by its proper name: Genocide?'

"Secretary Clinton responded, 'I will because we now have enough evidence.' She added, 'What is happening is genocide, deliberately aimed at destroying not only the lives but wiping out the existence of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East in territory controlled by ISIS, and so I agree with you.'"

Marist Poll: Americans Say ISIS is Committing Genocide Against Christians

On December 31, the Knights of Columbus Published a poll which finds that most Americans say ISIS is committing genocide against Christians:

"By a wide margin, most Americans agree with the presidential candidates of both parties in calling ISIS' atrocities against Christians in the Middle East "genocide," according to a KofC-Marist poll conducted this month.

"Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush, Mike Huckabee and Martin O'Malley have all called the situation genocide.

"By almost 20 points, 55 percent to 36 percent, Americans agree that this targeting of Christians and other religious minorities meets the U.N. definition of genocide.

"In addition, nearly 6 in 10 Americans (59 percent), say they have heard "a great deal" or "a good amount" about the targeting of Christians and other religious minorities in the region by ISIS."

To read more, click here: <http://prn.to/1J5cIHC>

IDC Board Members and Chairman Royce Write Letter to Secretary Kerry

IDC Board Members Professor Robert Destro and Dr. Thomas Farr signed an important left-right, ecumenical coalition letter that was sent on Dec. 4 to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, requesting a meeting to brief him about genocide confronting Iraq and Syria's Christian communities. Signatories represented a broad range of distinguished religious leaders and scholars.

On December 23, Chairman Royce, along with 29 Members of the House of Representatives, also sent a letter to Secretary Kerry asking that the State Department acknowledge and respond to the aforementioned letter signed by IDC's Board Members, and expressing his concern that the administration may exclude Christians from a potential genocide determination.

In the letter to Secretary Kerry, the members write: "We are gravely concerned by persistent press reports that the Administration is preparing a genocide finding that would apply only to Yazidis, and may avoid judgment about whether ISIL is also committing genocide against Christians and the other minorities it is eliminating. ... At the hands of ISIL, Christians and other minorities have faced mass murder, crucifixions, sexual slavery, torture, beheadings, the kidnapping of children, and other violence deliberately calculated to eliminate their communities from the so-called Islamic State."

The signed letter is available here: <http://1.usa.gov/1PtKOlh>

Statement by the President on Persecuted Christians at Christmas

On December 23, President Obama released the following statement (<http://1.usa.gov/1YDv0kL>):

"During this season of Advent, Christians in the United States and around the world are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. At this time, those of us fortunate enough to live in countries that honor the birthright of all people to practice their faith freely give thanks for that blessing. Michelle and I are also ever-mindful that many of our fellow Christians do not enjoy that right, and hold especially close to our hearts and minds those who have been driven from their ancient homelands by unspeakable violence and persecution.

"In some areas of the Middle East where church bells have rung for centuries on Christmas Day, this year they will be silent; this silence bears tragic witness to the brutal atrocities committed against these communities by ISIL."

On December 28, IDC Executive Director Kirsten Evans told Newsmax, "In Defense of Christians is grateful to President Obama for making this year's annual Christmas message an opportunity to manifest solidarity with and raise awareness about the terrible plight of the Christian community under ISIS."

Senators Introduce Companion Resolution to H. Con. Res. 75

On December 18, Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) introduced for himself and Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Mark Kirk (R-IL), and Roger Wicker (R-MS) a bipartisan resolution, S. Res. 340, denouncing the genocide against Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq and Syria. Click here to read the Arabic translation of the resolution by IDC Iraq Adviser Loay Mikhael.

The companion house resolution, H. Con. Res. 75, which was introduced by Rep. Fortenberry (R-NE) in September, now has 170 co-sponsors.

IDC is working with a broad, bi-partisan coalition of American and international religious leaders, activists, and scholars in urging the administration to officially recognize the genocide ISIS has waged against Assyrian Chaldean Syriac Christians, Yezidis, and other ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq and Syria.

At IDC's National Leadership Convention in September, more than 120 IDC state chapter leaders from across America, in an unprecedented show of unified political action on behalf of the Christians of the Middle East, pressed lawmakers to support H. Con. Res. 75, meeting with over 250 Congressional offices in a day.

Please ask your representative and senators to co-sponsor H. Con. Res. 75 and S. Res. 340 if they have not already! Click here to see if your representative has co-sponsored H. Con. Res. 75 and here to see if your senators have co-sponsored S. Res. 340.

United Kingdom Parliamentarians Write to PM Cameron About Christian Genocide

On December 21, Lord Alton & Rob Flello, MP led a letter signed by more than sixty parliamentarians from both Houses to PM Cameron calling for the slaughter of Christians and Yazidis in Syria to be named as a genocide and requesting to meet with the Prime Minister:

"We write to ask you to meet a delegation of Members from both Houses and all parties to discuss our profound concern at what is now clearly best described as "genocide" being perpetrated by Daesh against minority communities including Iraqi and Syrian Christians, Yazidis and other vulnerable groups.

"There is now clear evidence that this genocide includes assassinations of Church leaders; mass murders; torture, kidnapping for ransom in the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria; sexual enslavement and systematic rape of Christian girls and women; forcible conversions to Islam; destruction of churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and Christian artifacts; and theft of lands and wealth from Christian clergy and laity alike. ISIS has made its own public statements taking "credit" for mass murder of Christians, and expressing its intent to eliminate Christian communities from its "Islamic State".

To read more, click here: <http://bit.ly/1O6sNgk>

Parliament of Lithuania Passes Genocide Resolution, European Parliamentarian Prepares to Introduce Resolution

On December 15, the Parliament of Lithuania passed a resolution by massive majority calling on the United Nations and the European Parliament to recognize the plight of Christians in the Middle East - and in particular in Syria, Iraq, Iran and north Africa - as an act of genocide and to act in accordance with the UN Human Rights Convention. Lithuania is the first EU country to legally call the persecution of Christians in the Middle East by Isis and other Muslim organisations genocide.

A European Parliamentarian is also working on a resolution calling on EU members to recognize that the Islamic State terror group is committing genocide against Christians and other minorities, and act upon that reality. Lars Adaktusson of the Christian Democrats party in Sweden wrote (November 30) in an op-ed published by Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet that there is clear evidence IS wants to eradicate all Christians from the territory it has captured across Iraq and Syria.

To read more, click here: <http://bit.ly/231GBz4>
