

Countdown to death of Christianity in parts of Middle East ticking ever louder

Report: 2019 Persecuted and Forgotten?:

<https://persecutedchristians.acninternational.org/>

Aid to the Church in Need (23.10.2019) – The countdown to Christianity's disappearance in parts of the Middle East is ticking ever louder – and can only be stopped if the international community acts now – according to a new report launched today (Wednesday, 23rd October) in London.

The 2019 *Persecuted and Forgotten?* report, produced by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), warns of Christianity vanishing from towns and cities in the region, as – despite the defeat of Daesh (ISIS) – the impact of genocide has led to haemorrhaging numbers of the faithful.

There were 1.5 million Christians in Iraq before 2003 but by mid-2019, they had fallen to well below 150,000 and perhaps even less than 120,000 – a decline of up to 90 percent within a generation.

In Syria Christian numbers have fallen by two thirds since the conflict began in 2011.

The ACN report notes that the international community has shown unprecedented concern about the persecution of the region's Christians, but failed to provide the aid required to ensure its survival during that period covered by the report (2017-19).

Persecuted and Forgotten? found that "Governments in the West and the UN failed to offer Christians in countries such as Iraq and Syria the emergency help they needed as genocide got underway."

The report warns that the Church in the region could vanish if radical Islamists were to mount another attack on vulnerable communities – a threat highlighted by reports of jihadists escaping prison, as a result of this month's renewed violence in north-east Syria. The *Persecuted and Forgotten?* report concludes: "Were there to be another Daesh-style assault on the faithful, it could result in the Church's disappearance.

"However, if security can be guaranteed there is every indication that Christianity could survive in Nineveh and Erbil."

Persecuted and Forgotten? also found that the persecution of Christians has worsened the most in South and East Asia – noting that, in 2017, 477 anti-Christian incidents were reported in India.

In the same region, 300 people died – and more than 500 were injured – in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday 2019 when jihadists bombed sites including three churches.

In a number of African countries Christians were threatened by Islamists seeking to eliminate the Church – either by use of force or by dishonest means, including bribing people to convert.

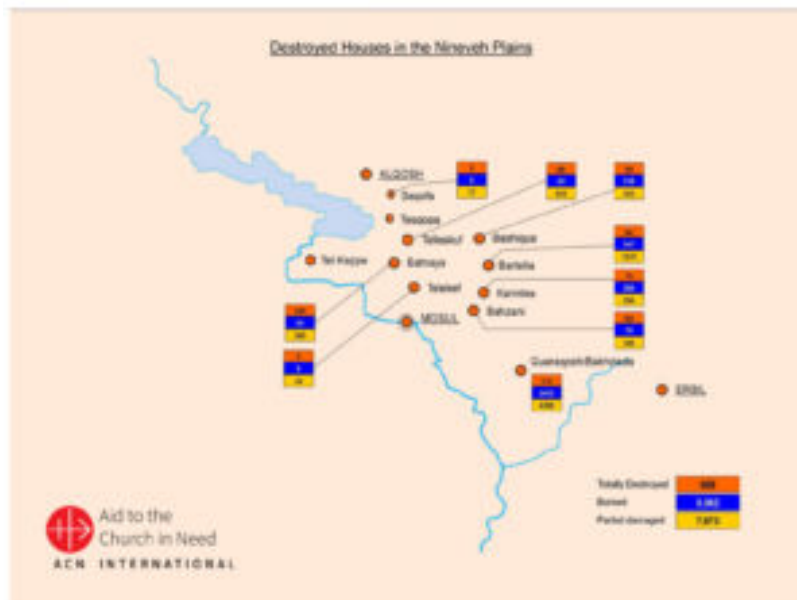
In Nigeria's north and the 'Middle Belt' regions, militants continued a reign of terror against Christians and Muslims alike – 3,731 Christians were reportedly killed in 2018.

While in other parts of the African continent, the main threat to Christians came from the state – over a 12-month period, more than 70 churches were attacked in Sudan's Nuba Mountains with 32 burnt down.

The report can be consulted (for now only in the English version – other languages coming soon): <https://persecutedchristians.acninternational.org/>

IRAQ: More than 12,000 private homes on the Nineveh

plains damaged by ISIS



Aid to the Church in Need (27.03.2017) – More than 12,000 private homes in twelve Christian villages on the Nineveh plains were damaged by the “Islamic State”. A total of 669 houses were completely destroyed. These were the findings of a study initiated by the pontifical foundation *Aid to the Church in Need*. According to the study, the costs for rebuilding will vastly exceed 200 million dollars.

As part of the study, 1,500 families who fled to Erbil from the affected regions were also asked whether they intended to return to the – now liberated – places they had come from. 1,308 of these responded.

41 per cent of the respondents indicated that they wanted to return to their native villages, 46 per cent said that they were considering it. In a survey also carried out by *Aid to the Church in Need* among 5,762 internally displaced persons in November 2016, only 3.28 per cent of the respondents wanted to return to their native villages; at that time, the security situation in the liberated region was still fragile and combat

operations were still ongoing.

57 per cent of respondents reported that their possessions had been plundered, 22 per cent responded that their houses had been destroyed. The rest could not provide any information on the current condition of their houses and belongings. Slightly over a quarter (25.46 per cent) reported that their papers had been stolen by the terrorists of the Islamic State.

Currently, there are still 14,000 registered families who fled from Mosul and the Nineveh plains living in Erbil. This is approximately equal to 90,000 people, down from originally 120,000 in 2014. Of these, twelve thousand families continue to depend on humanitarian aid from *Aid to the Church in Need*.

The study, carried out by *Aid to the Church in Need* with the help of local church employees, consisted of three parts: first, the damages done to private homes by ISIS was ascertained. The findings of the investigation on the damages to social institutions such as schools and clinics as well as to church buildings will follow.

The evaluation and reconstruction process

In November 2016, Aid to the Church in Need agreed with the leaders of the 3 major Christian rites of the Nineveh Plains (Chaldean Catholic, Syriac Catholic and Syriac Orthodox) to hire teams of engineers who would be able to go village per village, house by house, and document the extent of damages, with the view of estimating the costs of repair.



In early February Aid to the Church in Need representatives went to Erbil and met with these engineers, who also showed them the satellite photography they had used, with the cooperation of the international alliance stationed in Erbil. These figures result from these studies.

Aid to the Church in Need has all the details that the engineers used, the same software and type of photos used to describe the damage. Reports are in English and in Arabic. The registers of all the families in need (the 90,000 people) is kept with the Chaldean Archbishop of Erbil and is always up to date (families come every week for the aid packages and amend the register when necessary).

In a historical first, the 3 rites have formed a joint Reconstruction Committee to be able to apply to the EU and other funding sources.

Reconstruction started on 6 February in Tel Skof, 170 families have already moved back. We are supporting them with the reconstruction of the school, which should be ready by the end of June, allowing the parents to register their children for the September new school year.

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