

Interview with William Warda. Spanish Newspaper ABC. June 7, 2015

<< *Since the fall of Saddam Hussein 700 Christians have died for their faith* >>

“The caliphate only gives three options to victims: to leave, convert to Islam or be killed”, said the human rights expert of the Alliance of Minorities in Iraq

Member of the Executive Committee of the Iraqi Minorities Alliance, **William K. Warda** intervened in Madrid at the Seminar on religious freedom organized by the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies of the Foundation Social Promotion of Culture at the **Casa Árabe** in Madrid.

—Is there an expressed desire by the jihadist movement to eradicate Christianity in Iraq?

—Information is not exaggerated. Christians are being expelled from all the communities conquered by the Jihadists, their homes destroyed or seized, women are often raped. The Chaldean Catholic Church lives undoubtedly the most critical moment of its ancient history.

—What information does your organization have on the dimensions of drama?

—The official statistics indicate that in 1997 there were 1.2 million Christians in Iraq. Now it is thought that there is less than half a million. That is, nearly one million Christians have fled the country because of the intolerant policies, the increased Muslim fanaticism and the war. In Nineveh, where some 200,000 Christians lived, the flight was massive because in the region the Jihadists of the Islamic State are acting.

“The deaths are attributed both to the EI and other radical Islamists”

—How many Christians have died for their faith in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein?

We estimate, and thus appear in our latest report on human rights that over 1,100 Christians have been killed since 2003, more than 700 only for religious causes. The killings are attributed to both the Islamic State militants and other radical Islamists, which in some cases wanted revenge for the US invasion

— What magnitude has the damage caused to religious and artistic heritage of the Chaldean Church?

—The region with the highest concentration of churches taken by jihadists is around Nineveh. Most of them have been burned; some have been respected, and the Islamic State used them as ammunition depots or as shelter from aviation attacks. We also know that they have taken authentic treasures of our sacred art: old liturgy books written in Aramaic, the native language of Jesus, in the early centuries of Christianity.

— What is the strategy of the self proclaimed caliphate regarding the Christian populations they conquered? Do they want to eliminate them, terrorize them till they flee or, conversely, prefer them to stay as subjects of the Caliph obliged to pay the excise duty by not be Muslims?

— Their ideology is to deny the right to reside in the caliphate to non-Muslim. Christians are offered only three options: to leave, be converted to Islam or be killed. There is no other alternative.

— How does the Islamic State Jihadist treat the other minorities?

— The same, and in some cases worse. That is the situation of the members of the Yazidi sect, which are not considered Muslim by the Jihadists. As they are not even the "people of the Book" they are punished

more cruelly than Christians. Our organization, Hammurabi, has rescued in recent months many women captured by the Jihadists, and their testimonies are horrifying.

"The US withdrawal in 2011 was a big mistake"

— Many criticize the discriminatory treatment of the Iraqi government, controlled by the Shiite majority, towards the Sunnis minority. Do you think the Iraqi government respects religious freedom in the territories under its control?

—Our Constitution guarantees freedom of worship, but legislation inspired by Sharia, Islamic law, contradicts it quite often. For example, we have a law that if the Christian father converts to Islam, their children automatically become Muslim, without waiting for the majority of age when they would be the ones who decide whether or not to leave the Church. Despite its promises, the government does not want to change a law that over the years has produced thousands of mandatory desertions in the Chaldean Church.

— What has been in your opinion the ideological legacy of the US passing by Iraq after overthrowing Saddam?

— The US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 was a big mistake. With that decision it was given Iran an opportunity to replace them and move on to play a leading role in the country. In addition, the gap left by the Americans was also quickly occupied by Islamist fanatics with the result we know.

"We do not want to leave our land"

— Do you feel abandoned by the West?

— Yes, before, the Christians were a powerful community in Iraq, both in economic and intellectual terms, but they have now lost everything. They are forced to leave their homes and possessions, to seek refuge in other regions or abroad. Some organizations such as "Christian Solidarity International" and other NGOs send help, but in the government land we feel like orphans both from US and European governments. North America gives facilities to the Iraqi Christians who want to emigrate-and they can, but we need support to continue in our land. We do not want to leave Iraq.