

CNEWA launches appeal to aid fleeing Iraqi Christian families

Tom Gallagher | Jul. 31, 2014 NCR Today

The New York City-based Catholic Near East Welfare Association issued the following urgent appeal in a press release Monday:

Catholic Near East Welfare Association has launched a campaign to rush emergency assistance to tens of thousands of Christians forced to flee their homes in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

Ordered by ISIS extremists of the self-proclaimed Islamic Caliphate to convert, pay a special tax or die, Mosul's Christians have instead fled to the Christian villages of the Nineveh Plain -- some just a few miles from Mosul -- or to the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

"These Christian families have arrived with only their clothes, having been forced to leave everything behind in Mosul," said CNEWA's regional director for Jordan and Iraq, Ra'ed Bahou. "Fleeing the city on foot, ISIS militants then stole whatever dollars they had in their pockets, even their passports and identification papers."

Christian families have found refuge in churches, convents and monasteries, he added. With Syriac Catholic Archbishop Yohanna Moshe of Mosul and the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena -- themselves homeless -- the clergy, religious and villagers are trying to provide the basics. But the refuge, especially in the villages of Alqosh, Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Bartella and Tel Kaif is tenuous at best, as ISIS has cut the electricity and water supply, and has announced its intentions to overrun the region. "These villages are in the hands of God," Mr. Bahou said, "as ISIS says their next 'gift' will be the villages of the Nineveh Plain."

CNEWA's president, Msgr. John E. Kozar, announced CNEWA will rush support to the bishops, clergy and religious, "who in the frenzy are courageously providing water, food, mattresses and medicines to their flock," wherever their flight takes them.

"We are witnessing, at the hands of extremist thugs, the eradication of a cradle of Christianity in the cradle of civilization," Msgr. Kozar said. CNEWA's emergency support will provide the "shepherds of this flock to tend their sheep, with the basics they need for survival now," he continued. "We will help them even if their flock is dispersed, providing for their well-being, body and soul."

Fewer than 150,000 Christians remain in Iraq from a high of more than a million before 1991.

An agency of the Holy See, Catholic Near East Welfare Association works throughout the Middle East, with offices in Amman, Beirut and Jerusalem. On behalf of the pope, CNEWA works for, through and with the Eastern churches, rushing aid to religious caring for orphaned and abandoned children; caring for displaced or refugee families; providing maternity and health care for the

poorest of the poor; offering formation and catechetical programs for children and young adults; supporting the education of seminarians, religious novices and lay leaders; and assisting initiatives for the marginalized, especially the elderly and disabled.

CNEWA has been active in Iraq for more than 50 years, but redoubled its efforts among the vulnerable Christian population in 1991.

A religious charity registered in the State of New York, all contributions are tax deductible. Donations can be made online at www.cnewa.org [1], by phone at [800.442.6392](tel:800.442.6392) [2], or by mail, CNEWA, 1011 First Avenue, New York, NY 10022-4195.

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