

Iraqi archbishop: Christians, tired of waiting, will leave country

LONDON - An Iraqi archbishop has predicted a new wave of emigration from Iraq involving Christians who have tired of waiting for their situation to improve.

Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk said many Christians taking refuge in northern Iraq were determined “to leave the country for good” after concluding that, nearly seven years after the invasion of Iraq by a U.S.-led coalition, it was still unsafe to return to their homes in the South.

He told the British branch of Aid to the Church in Need, a charity set up to help suffering and persecuted Christians, that a lack of jobs and services in the Kurdish north would speed emigration.

In a Jan. 6 statement issued by the charity, Archbishop Sako said: “In Kurdistan, the security is quite good, but there are no jobs, no services and facilities in the new villages built by the Kurdish government.

“Therefore many families are leaving the country for good,” he said.

“In years gone by, Christians left their houses and property and reached a secure area in the hope of being back soon,” the archbishop said, adding “They want to be settled.

“They have no jobs, no schools and they have big problems with the language. There are no services - electricity, potable water, infrastructure are their problems.”

According to Aid to the Church in Need, the Christian population in Iraq has

dropped from 1.4 million in 1987 to barely 300,000 today, with many fleeing terror attacks and persecution after the ousting of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Over the Christmas season Christians were subjected to attacks, and security fears led Archbishop Sako to cancel Christmas Masses in Kirkuk.