

# Iraqi refugees not shocked over archbishop's death

BEIRUT, Lebanon – Iraqi Chaldean Catholic refugees in Beirut expressed fear for Christians still living in Iraq, but said they were not shocked upon hearing the news of the kidnapping and death of Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, Iraq.

Karim, a 41-year-old father of four who fled to Lebanon from Mosul in 2007, said: “We were praying for his release. But we’ve seen enough kidnapping and murders to expect differently. It is sad, not only this kidnapping and assassination, but they are kidnapping and assassinating Christians daily.”

Karim, like all the refugees interviewed by Catholic News Service in Beirut March 13, requested his full name not be used. Between 5,000 and 10,000 Iraqi Chaldean Catholics are refugees in Lebanon.

Akram, a 55-year-old Iraqi who fled to Lebanon from Mosul with his wife and eight children last April, said, “We were very, very sad, not just today, but since Feb. 29” when the archbishop was kidnapped in an attack that left his driver and two bodyguards dead. Archbishop Rahho’s body was recovered by church officials after the kidnappers told them where they had buried him. His funeral and burial were March 14 outside Mosul.

“When I heard the news, it stirred such fear in me,” said Shoukrie, Akram’s wife. “It’s like we’re living the Iraqi nightmare for Christians all over again.”

“We knew Samir, Ramy (the archbishop’s bodyguards) and Ferris (the archbishop’s driver), who was a relative of mine. He was an usher at the church,” she said.

Akram recalled that in Mosul they had witnessed church bombings and desecrations of the Eucharist.

“A neighbor of ours got kidnapped and they asked for a ransom. When his family paid the ransom, they were told that he would be waiting for them in a few hours at

a certain place," he told CNS. "When the family arrived, he had already been killed.

"I don't want to generalize," Akram added. "It's not all Muslims who do all these horrible things, but it's the fanatics that are scaring us."

Adil, a 60-year-old widow and mother of four, fled to Lebanon from Mosul in 2005 after her husband was killed.

"Even though we are in Lebanon - and thank God we feel safe - we can't help, when we hear news like this, to have a sense of insecurity again," said Adil. "On the day of the kidnapping, we were already concerned and almost knew he would be assassinated later on.

"It's not new to us. We witnessed churches vandalized to the point they opened the tabernacle and threw the host on the floor and stomped on it. With people like that, nothing surprises us," she said.

A memorial Mass was to be held for Archbishop Rahho at St. Raphael Chaldean Catholic Church outside Beirut.

Chaldean Catholic Bishop Ibrahim N. Ibrahim, the bishop for most Iraqi Catholics in the United States, said many Iraqis living in Michigan knew Archbishop Rahho. Since October, 2,800 Iraqi Chaldean Catholics have resettled in the Detroit area, which has the largest Iraqi population in the United States.

"We are from Mosul, all of us," said Bishop Ibrahim March 13.

"He was believing in the fraternity of all humankind," Bishop Ibrahim said of Archbishop Rahho. "He was preaching the forgiveness for everyone. He was preaching to take care of each other, without regards to the faith or the name or the gender."

Bishop Ibrahim said Archbishop Rahho spent his whole life in Mosul and was close to Catholics.

"He was very close to his flock, very close, especially to those who were marginalized - poor people, handicapped people," he said. "He was very good with

the Muslims.”

He said the Chaldean Catholic community was to have a March 14 memorial service for Archbishop Rahho at Mother of God Chaldean Catholic Church in Southfield, Mich.

Contributing to this story was Joe Kohn in Detroit.