

Report: Number of Iraqi Christian murders skyrocketed since 2003

WASHINGTON - The number of Christians murdered in Iraq since 2003 skyrocketed compared to murders in 1995-2002, said a comprehensive report based on public accounts from Iraqi Christian sources.

The report described in detail the deaths of Christian children - including babies - laypeople, priests and nuns who were burned, beaten or blown up in car bombs throughout the past few years.

From May 2003 to early June, 268 Iraqi Christians were murdered; from 1995 to 2002, 19 Iraqi Christians were murdered, said the report, "Incipient Genocide: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians of Iraq."

The report, released June 12, was written by Peter BetBasoo, a founder of the Assyrian International News Agency. The agency was founded in 1995 to report on news and analysis of issues regarding Iraqi Christians.

The report detailed attacks on Iraqi Christian women and students.

"Young Christian women are abducted and raped," it said, adding that female students are also targets of ridicule and discrimination.

"Female students were targeted in Basra and Mosul for not wearing veils; some had nitric acid squirted on their faces," it said. "Elders of a village in Mosul were warned not to send females to universities."

The report said that when kidnapped women are released their psychological torture does not end.

"In one case in Baghdad, the victim committed suicide after the ransom was paid" because of the "sexual violence she suffered," said the report.

Though a consensus on the total number of violently killed Iraqi civilians is difficult to pin down, a U.N. report released in May said that 34,452 Iraqi civilians - 94 every

day - were killed in 2006.

The Assyrian report said that less than 3 percent of Iraqi Christian murders took place in southern Iraq, while more than 35 percent of the murders took place in northern Iraq and nearly 62 percent took place in central Iraq.

Kurds, Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims and al-Qaida terrorists are all responsible for the murders, bombings and psychological terror imposed on Iraqi Christians, it said.

However, Iraqi Christians - who are commonly referred to as Assyrians and who are Orthodox or Catholic - do not direct violence toward their aggressors, the report said.

"Whereas Sunni-Shiite violence is characterized by mutual aggression, Muslim-Assyrian violence is unidirectional: Assyrians are exclusively the victims," the report said. "Assyrians are unarmed and have not engaged in any acts of aggression.

"Muslim violence on Assyrians is primarily driven by deep religious prejudice and the strict application of Shariah (Islamic law) by 'jihadists,'" it said.

It also included descriptions of the destruction of church properties and businesses owned by Iraqi Christians.

"Ninety-five percent of liquor stores were attacked, defaced or bombed," it said, adding that "500 Assyrian shops in a Dora market were burned in one night."

The report said al-Qaida terrorists recently moved into Dora, a predominantly Iraqi Christian neighborhood in Baghdad, and began enforcing "strict Islamic law" and forcing residents to pay a "jizya," a poll tax once levied on Christians and Jews living in Muslim countries, "in exchange for being allowed to live and practice their faith as well as being entitled to 'Muslim protection' from outside aggression."

"Christian Assyrian wives were instructed to go to a certain mosque and pay, which they did out of fear," it said. "The stated reason for the payment was 'We do the fighting and you pay to support.'"