



Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

**Talk given at the IRF Summit by Archbishop Warda  
Washington, D.C., International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit (July 13-15)**

## **The Social Impact of Persecution and Religious Discrimination**

Good afternoon and thank you to the organizers for putting on this important event which is so necessary for keeping the subject of persecution and religious discrimination from being forgotten.

I will speak to you today of my own experience in observing the impact of persecution in Iraq as it occurred during the time of the ISIS war and the following years up to the present time. In particular, I will speak to you about the impact of persecution and displacement upon the most important social structure within any society – the family.

In brief, sustained persecution against a group, if not stopped, eventually takes from them their physical properties, their livelihoods, their security, and in the end, their dignity as human beings. Once this dignity is destroyed, the family and all social stability is destroyed with it. And while buildings can be quickly rebuilt, the restoring of dignity to those who have been brutally marginalized and humiliated as human beings is a far more difficult journey – a journey which for which the hidden costs are far greater than that of any physical reconstruction. And this restoration of dignity requires of international interveners and providers of aid something beyond the mere metrics of dollars spent and projects completed. It requires an honest and sincere treatment of affected people with a simple thing – that is respect for them as human beings. As His Holiness Pope Francis has said before to the international aid community “People before Projects.”

In Iraq, the genocide against Christians and the mass displacement that followed forced tens of thousands of families into homelessness. Within this already most difficult situation, Fathers were made powerless to take care of their families. Turned overnight into helpless beggars, the years for most of them have stretched on without opportunity to provide for their families and secure a meaningful future for their children.

Efforts to build businesses are still stolen from them by their persecutors, who continue to exist in Iraq but now in different clothing, as soon as they begin to grow. Aid programs which are designed to achieve social, financial and political objectives designed in the West, direct innocent and powerless recipients concerning ways in which they must now behave in order to be helped out of their misery. In other words, as a condition of receiving charity, the persecuted innocents must now allow themselves to be further judged and accept the fact without protest when they are found wanting. Indignity upon indignity then, and where does this lead?



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In Iraq, as in every other place in this fallen world, it leads to unrest, breakdown of the family, the despair of dependency, and finally exodus. And it all begins when we allow the seeds of persecution to grow, when we first begin to steal dignity from one another. Whatever hope remains for the Christians and religious minorities of Iraq, all the reconstructing of buildings will be for nothing without a greater focus on the rebuilding of dignity. In this, my friends, we all have very hard work still in front of us. For my people and my broken country, I pray that we will continue to have your support in this longest journey.

Thank you.