

# Baghdad Believers Being Terrorized For Crime Of Christianity [Excerpts]

Is Islam Incompatible With Democracy, Decency?  
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BAGHDAD, Iraq — An al-Qaida-affiliated insurgent group is giving Christians in Baghdad a stark set of options: Convert to Islam, marry your daughters to our fighters, pay an Islamic tax or leave with only the clothes on your back.

A U.S. military official said American forces became aware of the threats only last month and now have erected barriers around the largest Christian enclave in Baghdad's Dora neighborhood in an effort to protect its residents.

Christians in Baghdad refuse to discuss the threats for fear of retribution. But in Syria, where thousands of Iraqi Christians have fled, tales abound of families that were killed or driven from their homes because they either refused or couldn't afford to pay the jizya, a tax usually levied on non-Muslim men of military age that's been part of Islam for more than 1,000 years.

"Two or three months ago, we heard we were going to be forcibly removed from Dora," said Rafah Elia Daoud, 53, who fled to Damascus, Syria's capital, on May 24. "Not everyone got a paper with the threat, but we knew. The choice was to convert, pay the jizya or get out."

"My brother was threatened; my sister was threatened. All of them had to pay the jizya," added her husband, Jamal Antone Karoumy, 66. "One of my brothers got a note and a single bullet under his door. The note said, 'If you don't pay the jizya to the resistance, you'll be killed.'"

Madeline Shukr Yusuf, 74, is still shaken by her recent escape to Damascus. She said she didn't have enough money to pay a monthly jizya of 250,000 Iraqi dinars, about \$200. The insurgents were determined to collect their

tax, she said.

"They wanted to kill me and take my gold bracelets," she said, tears filling her eyes at the memory. "They tell us pay or give a daughter in marriage to a fighter."

Baghdad had major Christian enclaves in the central neighborhood of Karada, the eastern mostly Shiite neighborhood of New Baghdad and nearby al-Ghadir and the notorious Sunni-dominated Doura in the capital's south.

As Iraq has descended into chaos, however, many Christians have fled, joining an estimated 2.2 million exiles, including 1.4 million Iraqis now estimated to be living in Syria. At least 19,000 Iraqi Christians have registered in Damascus with the United Nations refugee agency, and thousands more are thought to have sought shelter there, but have yet to register.

A Christian Iraqi legislator estimated Tuesday that a half-million Christians have fled Iraq since 2004.