

# Will Syria's Christians Survive?

February 03, 2014 | [Darrell Gleason](#)

Syria's Christian population could vanish, according to church leaders who recently spoke before the Heritage Foundation.

A delegation that spoke to the Heritage Foundation Jan. 27 were the first Syrian Christian church leaders to visit the U.S. since civil war erupted in the the Middle Eastern country in 2011.

During the ongoing armed conflict, Syrian forces and the opposition have both been criticized for serious human rights abuses, including kidnapping, torture, sexual abuse and summary executions. "Today, we are faced with a potential extinction of the church," said Patrick Sookhdeo, chairman of the Westminster Institute. "Not just in Syria. We've seen it in Iraq. The church could fall in Lebanon."

In Iraq last month, three Christmas day bombings targeting Christians killed at least 37 people and wounded more. Attacks in Iraq have taken their toll on the county's dwindling Christian population, which is estimated to number between 400,000 and 600,000. The attacks have largely been carried out by radical Muslim groups such as al-Qaida, which view Christians as unbelievers.

In December alone, 441 people were killed during a wave of attacks that brought violence to levels not seen since 2008. According to United Nations estimates, more than 8,000 people were killed in Iraq in 2013.

Reports indicate that similar atrocities are now occurring in Syria. Media reports indicate that more than 1,200 Christians were martyred in Syria last year, with additional tens of thousands being displaced by violence and persecution. "Christians in their homeland have been attacked an invaded, houses have been ransacked, Christians have been kidnapped for ransom and brutally murdered," said Bishop Julian Dobbs, a Syrian Christian leader who spoke before the Heritage Foundation. Dobbs described Syria as once being "one of the easiest places in the world to be a Christian across the Middle East."

Open Doors, which serves the persecuted church overseas, has placed five Middle Eastern countries in its top 10 list of the world's worst persecutors of Christians. In its Jan. 8 report, Open Doors included the following from the Middle East: Syria; Iraq; Saudi Arabia; Iran; and Yemen.

Prior the Iraq War, the Christian population in that country was roughly 5 percent of the population, with more than 1.5 million. A decade later, the Christian population is estimated at fewer than 400,000.

Drawing parallels to what happened in Iraq, the Rev. Riad Jarjour, former general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, said the escalation of violence in Syria "has instilled fear in the hearts of Christian leaders." The Rev. Adib Awad, general secretary of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria said: "Due to persecutions, due to killings, we are all together less than 20 percent of the Syrian population." According to Western estimates, about 45,000 Christians out of a total Christian population of about 2 million have fled Syria, however the end to the war could ironically even bring about more persecution.

Opposition forces have boasted of setting up an Islamic state based on Sharia law once Assad is overthrown. Such a state would treat Christians...

*To read this article in its entirety, go to:*

<http://www.prophesynewswatch.com/2014/February03/035.html>