

## 50 Christians killed amid Syria unrest; many families need humanitarian aid

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### Barnabas Fund international director visits Syria, hears concerns of Christian leaders

Around 50 Christians have been killed in the anti-government unrest in Homs, Syria, by both rebels and government forces, while many more are struggling to feed their families as the violence brings normal life in the city to a halt.

In one tragic incident, a young Christian boy was killed by the rebels, who filmed the murder and then claimed that government forces had committed the act. Another Christian was seized by the rebels, taken to a house and asked, "How do you want to die?" The man completely broke down and was released but has been left in severe psychological distress.

Many Christian families have fled Homs because of the violence between government troops and the rebels, which has claimed around 1,500 lives in the city. They have left behind their homes, possessions and jobs, so are now struggling to find the means to feed their families. Some of those who are staying in the city are too afraid to leave their homes to go to work, so they too are in great financial hardship. Few dare to go out after 3pm or on Fridays, when the streets are most dangerous.

A Christian leader in Homs said that the Christian areas of the city are surrounded by rebels. They sometimes try to "disappear" into Christian neighbourhoods, which are generally expected to be peaceful, but they are hunted down there by the army, and violence ensues.



Iraqi Christian refugee in Syria receives a food parcel from Barnabas Fund

### Barnabas director meets Christians in Syria

Barnabas Fund's International Director, Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, returned earlier this month from a visit to Syria. He met with senior Syrian church leaders, who expressed the concerns of the country's Christians about the ongoing unrest.

Christians comprise a significant proportion of the Syrian population, around ten per cent (two million); this includes thousands of Iraqi Christian refugees who have been forced from their homeland by anti-Christian violence and persecution.

The Syrian regime may not function according to Western standards, but it has afforded the Christian community equality and religious freedom; Syria is one of the few Arab lands where Christians have enjoyed respect and been allowed to live peacefully among their Muslim neighbours.

But the current crisis has destabilised that harmony as Christians are perceived as supporters of the Assad government, having been well treated under his regime. And, as in other countries affected by the "Arab Spring", radical Islamists in Syria – with backing from Saudi Arabia – have seized the opportunity created by the unrest to pursue their agenda, increasing the danger for Christians.

### Christians fear repeat of Iraq

Christians fear that their precarious position will only worsen as the international community intensifies pressure on the Syrian government and appears to be moving towards military intervention. Weapons and militants from outside are already coming into the country, strengthening the rebels' campaign.

A senior Syrian church leader has written:

*The people of Syria do not want the international powers to interfere in their lives and so divide the country as they did in Iraq. Any such hidden agenda of the superpowers will mean the end of Christianity in the Middle East. Simply look at what happened to the Christians of Iraq after the war began there... A great number of them had no choice but to leave the country forever, and those who stayed remain marginalised to this day. Not to forget that many of them were persecuted and their churches bombed. Accordingly, Christians in Syria are very suspicious of the interference of the superpowers, because their destiny stands to be no different than that of their Iraqi brothers and sisters.*

Western and Arab media have presented a distorted picture of the unrest in Syria. The undeniable atrocities being committed by the government have been well documented, but equally despicable acts by the rebels do not make the headlines. And while some reports suggest that the country is in a state of civil war, in reality the conflict is at present mainly concentrated in Homs. Such one-sided reporting is fuelling international pressure against the government.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Fund, said:

*The tragedy facing Syria, especially the Christian community and other minorities, is potentially another Iraq. It is now recognised that the war in Iraq was not only misguided but also illegal, with devastating consequences for the peoples of Iraq, especially the Christians. This must not be allowed to happen again. Christians must now pray for peace and stability, but also urge their governments not to engage in actions in Syria without considering the consequences.*

Christians in Syria, including Iraqi refugees, are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance as sanctions and the unrest are beginning to cripple the country's economy. People who have lost jobs and homes are coming to the churches asking for food. Barnabas Fund has created a special Middle East Fund to help those who are being affected by the crisis across the region. [A family of four needs £3 a day for food](#) (US\$5, €3.60, NZ\$6.20, AUS\$4.65).

## Give Today

If you would like to help Christians affected by the unrest in the Middle East, please send your donation to the **Middle East Fund** (project 00-1032). [Donate Online](#) using our secure server.

If you prefer to telephone, dial: **0800 587 4006** from within the UK or **+44 1672 565031** from outside the UK. Please quote project reference **Middle East Fund** (project 00-1032).

If you prefer to send a cheque by post: [Click this link](#) for the address of our regional office. Please quote project reference **Middle East Fund** (project 00-1032).

For a quick donation of £3.00 by SMS ([see terms and conditions here](#)) text **Barnabas/1032** to **70007** (Please note: This facility is presently only available to UK supporters).

Please Pray:

- For all those in Syria who have lost loved ones or are suffering hardship as a result of the unrest.
- That peace will quickly be re-established and that the international community will carefully consider the effects on the Syrian population of any economic and military actions.
- For the Christians in Syria, that the Lord will protect His Church there and maintain for Himself a strong witness in that land.