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## **FEAR OF LOSING CHRISTIANITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.<sup>1</sup> REMARKS ON EXTREMISM, GENOCIDE, MERCY AND YOUTH FROM PERSECUTED AREAS**

**Abstract** **Fear of losing Christianity in the Middle East. Remarks on extremism, genocide, mercy and youth from persecuted areas.** Terrorist attacks in Europe and the Middle East in July 2016 spread horror and fear throughout the world. Istanbul, Baghdad, Nice, Munich, Saint Etienne-du-Rouvray – only to name the most quoted in the media. Terror organisations such as Daesh, especially in the Middle East, were and are taking a heavy toll not only on people's lives but also on their personal and collective identity, only to mention the very recent attack on the Egyptian mosque in November 2017 leaving over 300 people dead and hundreds injured. It proves that terrorists target all religious groups, including Muslims, nevertheless Christians are among the most suffering religious groups in the region. Physical violence is a major issue for Human Rights groups, but wiping out cultures and traditions with millenary roots is not a smaller challenge for the international community. However, Middle Eastern Christians, especially those of the young generation, have not lost all hope. It is true that some of them left Iraq and Syria, but many stay, hoping for a return to their homes, universities, jobs and businesses. This study aims to show the scale of persecution on Christians in the Middle East and their current legal status, but also tries to impart ideas for preserving Christianity in the region, based on the attitude of young Middle-Eastern Christians towards the issue.

**Prześladowanie chrześcijaństwa na Bliskim Wschodzie. Uwagi na temat ekstremizmu, ludobójstwa, miłosierdzia i młodzieży z prześladowanych obszarów.** Ataki terrorystyczne w Stambule, Bagdadzie, Monachium czy Saint

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Etienne-du-Rouvray we Francji w lipcu 2016 roku wywołały strach i przerażenie na całym świecie. A wspomniane tu zostają tylko te, które wzbudziły jednocześnie największe zainteresowanie mediów. Organizacje terrorystyczne takie jak Daesh (ISIS), szczególnie na Bliskim Wschodzie, zbierały i zbierają żniwo nie tylko ludzkiego życia, ale także w postaci tożsamości społecznej i religijnej – wystarczy wspomnieć tu atak terrorystyczny na egipski meczet, którego fundamentaliści islamscy dokonali w listopadzie 2017 roku, a który zabrał ponad 300 ludzkich żyć. Atak ten udowodnił, że dla terrorystów celem jest każdy, także muzułmanie, jednakże to chrześcijanie są najbardziej prześladowaną religią świata. Przemoc fizyczna, zagrożenie zdrowia i życia to oczywiście problem najpoważniejszy, ale zmiatanie z powierzchni ziemi kultury i tradycji sięgającej korzeniami tysięcy lat wstecz jest nie mniejszym wyzwaniem dla całej społeczności międzynarodowej. Jednakże bliskowschodni chrześcijanie, w szczególności ci młodzi, nie stracili nadziei. Wielu z nich opuściło Irak czy Syrię, ale większość została, w nadziei na powrót do swoich domów, na uniwersytety, do pracy. Artykuł ten przedstawia skalę prześladowania Chrześcijan na Bliskim Wschodzie i jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie, jak ochronić chrześcijaństwo w tym regionie przed zniknięciem, biorąc pod uwagę działania młodych chrześcijan w Iraku i Syrii.

**Keywords** Christianity, Middle East, persecution, youth, World Youth Day

Chrześcijaństwo, Bliski Wschód, prześladowanie, młodzież, Światowe Dni Młodzieży

## 1. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The actions of the Islamic State fighters within the last years seem to justify the fear of extinction of a culture that the Western civilization is based on. Most analysts now share the concern about the possibility that Christianity may disappear from the very land of Jesus Christ, which was previously limited to church representatives and some experts. This paper aims to highlight the actions of the so-called Islamic State against Christianity but also to answer the question whether those actions may or may not lead to the extinction of Christianity in the region. Quantitative research is very hard to conduct in war-thorn areas like Iraq and Syria, therefore the paper focuses on qualitative methods such as direct interviews with Christians from the Middle East. This study takes advantage of the fact that, at the end of the worst month for Europe in recent history, July 2016, there was a large gathering of young Christians in Poland: World Youth Day Krakow (26/31 July). Among the 2,5 million of young people from 185 countries attending the event were young people from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. This paper explores whether their opinions support the fear that Christianity might disappear from the Middle East. Interviews were also conducted with NGO directors, representatives of church organisations and religious leaders in the area.

## 2. PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Since Iraq was invaded with initiative of American government, along with allied forces in 2003, according to ADF International: “the number of Christians has dropped from over 2 million to under a million in Syria, and from 1.4 million to under 260,000 in Iraq in just a few years.”<sup>2</sup>

The Christian Foundation Aid to the Church in Need estimates that 60 thousand Christians leave Iraq every year.<sup>3</sup> If that trend persists, in 2019 there might be not a single Christian person in the area. With Christians gone, ancient books, museums and historical sites<sup>4</sup> will be left behind, which could create loss to world’s heritage on an unprecedented scale. In fact, losing Christianity in that conflicted region would be a disaster for the Arab culture as well. Christians are not visitors there but a key element that promotes equality, universal education, human promotion and freedom against sectarianism and fundamentalism.<sup>5</sup>

That fear is rarely mentioned in headline news, yet needs to be urgently addressed. According to the International Society for Human Rights, a secular observatory based in Frankfurt, Germany, 80 per cent of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed at Christians. Statistically speaking, that makes Christians by far the most persecuted religious body on the planet; but this terrible fact is underrepresented in the Western media. As the American journalist John Allen puts it, “the global war on Christians remains the greatest story never told of the early 21st century.”<sup>6</sup>

It is important to stress that persecution of Christianity in the Middle East did not start in 2014, when Daesh came in. The first big terrorist attack to a Christian church took place on August 1, 2004.<sup>7</sup> Up to 2008, 59 Christian churches were targeted<sup>8</sup> and in the same year archbishop of Mosul was kidnapped and killed.<sup>9</sup> Since 2010, almost every church in Baghdad still operating already has a special protective fence. One of the bloodiest attacks on Christian churches took place in October 2010 when terrorists stormed the church full of worshippers during the mass on Sunday. 58 people were killed, dozens were wounded.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <http://adfinternational.org/regions/europe/campaigns/genocide> (1.08.2016).

<sup>3</sup> Report on Religious Freedom in the World, 2015 edition.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Isis and the Threat to the Christian Architectural Heritage, Oasis, <http://www.oasiscenter.eu/articles/eastern-christians/2016/03/21/isis-and-the-threat-to-the-christian-architectural-heritage> (15.09.2016).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Kh. Samir, *Rôle culturel des chrétiens dans le monde arabe*, Cedrac, Beirut, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> J. Allen Jr., *The War on Christians*, “The Spectator” 5 October 2013, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2013/10/the-war-on-christians/> (4.06.2016).

<sup>7</sup> *Leaders condemn Iraq church bombs*, BBC News, 2.08.2004, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3527032.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3527032.stm) (4.08.2016).

<sup>8</sup> *Church Bombings in Iraq Since 2004*, Assyrian Int’l News Agency, <http://sverigesradio.se/diverse/appdata/isidor/files/83/6810.pdf> (4.08.2016).

<sup>9</sup> K. Powers, *A Global Slaughter of Christians, but America’s Churches Stay Silent*, The Daily Beast, 27.09.2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/27/a-global-slaughter-of-christians-but-america-s-churches-stay-silent.html> (4.08.2016).

<sup>10</sup> A. Shadid, *Church Attack Seen as Strike at Iraq’s Core*, “The New York Times” 1.11.2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/world/middleeast/02iraq.html?\\_r=2&scp=3&sq=anthony%20shadid&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/world/middleeast/02iraq.html?_r=2&scp=3&sq=anthony%20shadid&st=cse)

Since June 30, 2014, when ISIS proclaimed the so-called Islamic State, the regular battle started not only to kill Christians, but also to wipe them out from the Middle East. Youssef, a young Christian from Mosul interviewed for the purpose of this paper recalls:

They said – we give you three choices – to convert to Islam, to be killed or to leave the town. So we decided to leave the town. We left, taking everything that was expensive.<sup>11</sup>

From the very beginning of ISIS actions in the Middle East, the message was clear:

We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This is His promise to us; He is glorified and He does not fail in His promise. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market.<sup>12</sup>

“Since 2003, we’ve lost priests, bishops and more than 60 churches were bombed”, Bashar Warda, the Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Erbil told the New York Times.<sup>13</sup>

Bishop Warda in fact started what became an on-going battle for saving Christianity in the Middle East by legal means – a call for naming this particular persecution genocide. He was visiting Brussels in October 2015 when the lawyer cooperating with Aid to the Church in Need asked:

Would you consider what is happening to the Christians in Iraq as genocide, considering that you don’t have to be dead but having a group persecuting you with intention of eliminating you – would you consider that this is genocide?<sup>14</sup>

As bishop Warda confirmed the statement, legal action was taken and following institutions proclaimed that genocide is committed towards Christians in Iraq and Syria:

- Council of Europe (January 27, 2016);
- European Parliament (February 4, 2016);
- US Department of State (proclaimed by Secretary of State John Kerry on March 17, 2016);
- UK Houses of Parliament (April 20, 2016).

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(4.08.2015).

<sup>11</sup> Youssef, Christian from Mosul, interviewed for the purpose of this paper July 28 2016 in Krakow, Poland. Interviews were conducted by Magdalena Mistygacz.

<sup>12</sup> *From Hypocrisy to Apostasy. The Extinction of the Grayzone*, “Dabiq” 12 February 2015, 7th Issue, p. 30, cited in: *Genocide against Christians in the Middle East*, A report submitted to Secretary of State John Kerry by the Knights of Columbus and In Defence of Christians, p. 9, <http://indefenseofchristians.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Genocide-report.pdf> (04.08.2016).

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html?_r=0) (04.08.2016).

<sup>14</sup> Marcela Szymanski, officer of Aid to the Church in Need, skype conversation with author, July 14, 2016.

Those legal actions followed a wide-cited UN report, in which the organisation stated:

The violence suffered by civilians in Iraq remains staggering. The so-called 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' (ISIL) continues to commit systematic and widespread violence and abuses of international human rights law and humanitarian law. These acts may, in some instances, amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide.<sup>15</sup>

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide clearly states that killing of a group is not the only factor:

**Article II:** In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>16</sup>

All of those crimes are committed towards Christians in Iraq and Syria, and examples can be found below along with the examples of acts of violence and cruelty, unseen on that scale for decades.<sup>17</sup>

In November 2014, five months after Mosul was taken, a report by Amnesty International was already speaking of an "ethnic cleansing on a historic scale" stating that the Islamic State has systematically targeted non-Arab and non Sunni Muslim communities, killing or abducting hundreds, possibly thousands, and forcing more than 830,000 others to flee the areas it has captured since 10 June 2014.<sup>18</sup>

During the same period, a United Nations report used the eloquent expression "rule of terror" to describe life in Syria under ISIS.<sup>19</sup>

Islamists deliberately create the conditions of life leading to a total or partial physical destruction of ethnic minorities such as Christians or Yazidis.<sup>20</sup> What also eliminates Christian groups from their neighbourhoods and cities they inhabited is cutting the possibility of further work or education.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMIRreport1May31October2015.pdf> (04.08.2016).

<sup>16</sup> Genocide (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, <http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm>) (12.12.2017).

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. A. Sehmer, *ISIS executed scores of children in a year of its caliphate*, "The Independent", <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-executed-scores-of-children-in-a-year-of-its-caliphate-10352256.html> (20.05.2018).

<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International, *Ethnic cleansing on a historic scale. The Islamic State systematic targeting of minorities in northern Iraq*, p. 4. The document is available at [bit.ly/1FMMDz](http://bit.ly/1FMMDz) (15.09.2016).

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria*, [bit.ly/1j5nVMB](http://bit.ly/1j5nVMB) (15.09.2016).

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. [http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/08/a-massacre-so-bloody-it-could-be-seen-from-space/?wp\\_login\\_redirect=0](http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/08/a-massacre-so-bloody-it-could-be-seen-from-space/?wp_login_redirect=0) (03.08.2016).

<sup>21</sup> Iraq: ISIS Abducting, Killing, Expelling Minorities, *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/19/iraq-isis-abducting-killing-expelling-minorities> (04.08.2016).

Moreover, ISIS uses measures that are intended to prevent births within the religious minority groups. People forced to live in barracks decide not to increase the family, fearing for the life of their unborn children.<sup>22</sup> Multiple reports of United Nations, US Secretary of State and organisations such as Aid to the Church in Need also prove the cruelty of ISIS towards Christians by taking the children away from Christian parents to be raised by the Islamic State leaders,<sup>23</sup> women taken hostage and forced to be sex slaves, men beheaded in front of their families for refusal to convert to Islam or for trying to get food supplies for the family.<sup>24</sup>

The Bishop of Baghdad, Basilio Yaldo asked if he fears that Christianity may vanish from the Middle East, stated: “Yes, this is our fear because the future is not clear. We ask the international community to put pressure to stop ISIS.”<sup>25</sup>

Christianity is being wiped out from the Middle East also on the heritage level. Only to name some: the American civil servant Tom Malinowski reflects that in 2014:

by mid-July, ISIL had destroyed hundreds of mosques and shrines throughout the territory it controlled, destroyed Christian statues of the Virgin Mary, and took sledgehammers to the tomb of the Prophet Jonah in Mosul.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. YOUTH – HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

“Looking at the cruelty of the concentration camp, I thought about today’s cruelty, which is similar; not as concentrated in that place, but around the world”<sup>27</sup> – Pope Francis delivered that message at his first General Audience after coming back from the Polish World Youth Day, on August 3, 2016, a week into visiting Aushwitz-Birkenau – one of the biggest death camps of Nazi Germany.

The Pontiff must have had in mind Christians persecuted all over the world, and especially those at the birthplace of Christianity – the Middle East.

World Youth Day (WYD) held in Southern Poland’s Krakow from 26 to 31 July 2016 was focused on mercy, and today’s humanitarian crisis is reflected in that theme, putting youth from persecuted areas in the centre of attention.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. P. Guzik, *Middle East without Christians? Contemporary genocide of the followers of Christ in Iraq and Syria (Bliski Wschód bez Chrześcijan? Współczesne ludobójstwo wyznawców Chrystusa na terenie Iraku i Syrii)*, “*Studia Socialia Cracoviensia*” 7 (2015) 2 (13), p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. J. Moore, *Defying ISIS*, Nashville 2015.

<sup>24</sup> C. Mitchel, *For Yazidis, Christians: „They Cut Us Like Sheep”*, CBN News, 26.08.2014, <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2014/August/Fleeing-Yazidis-Face-Uncertain-Future/> (8.08.2016).

<sup>25</sup> Msgr Basilio Yaldo, interviewed in Rome in April 2016 by author of the article.

<sup>26</sup> Testimony: Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor As-Prepared Opening Statement, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittees on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations and the Middle East and North Africa, Washington, DC, September 10, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/rm/2014/231483.htm> (5.08.2016).

<sup>27</sup> I. San Martin, *Francis says the violence of Aushwitz is ongoing*, Crux, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2016/08/03/francis-says-violence-auschwitz-ongoing/> (04.08.2016).

Thanks to Aid to the Church in Need – the humanitarian pontifical organisation – 3500 young Christians from troubled areas came to Krakow for World Youth Day celebrated with the Pope for the 31<sup>st</sup> time. Among the 350,000 registered pilgrims, hundreds of Syrians and Iraqis arrived, some registered from their countries of origins, some from their present countries of residence.

For the purpose of this research, seven young Christians from the Middle East were asked whether they think Christianity will vanish from the Middle East. Surprisingly enough, none of them answered positively to the question posed. “We hope that Christians will stay, we started this civilization so how come could we leave?”<sup>28</sup> noted Ramy from Iraq. Then he added:

We are the origins of the country. Despite of all the things that are happening we follow Jesus and we think we should not be afraid because if you follow him and if you trust him, you should not be afraid.

Many young Iraqis recall that not only Christians are those who emigrate from their country, remembering Muslim friends who lost their lives because of ISIS.

The message of unity and peace spread among those young people gathered for the meeting in Krakow brings hope that those youth will work fiercely for the sake of peace and religious freedom in Iraq and Syria. As they claim, the economic conditions of life in Europe that immigrants face do not encourage them to flee their own countries, rather they inspire them to work for the sake of peace and stability of their homeland: “Many Iraqi people want to leave Iraq” says Youssef. “They go to Australia, America, Canada. They are doctors, engineers and when they come to Europe they work like slaves”, the young man recalls.

The message spread by the Middle East youth during World Youth Day in Krakow was the one of encouragement to turn the hopeless situation into a positive outcome. Their view is realistic, not naïve (“The situation we are living now [...] it’s a type of genocide” says Margarita from Lebanon), but there is hope:

We as young people working with the Church, we should have the faith, hope – that we can change the situation, that we can try our best to return the people back to our land because this is the land where we were born and where we grew up. And we should continue to live on our land and not leave, we should try our best to be there.

The theme of World Youth Day 2016 was “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy”. Mercy was also put in the centre of attention by Middle Eastern youth:

Because of the wars and lack of mercy in the country as you know we have all the displaced people and all the bad situations. But as long as we believe in Jesus Christ and his will, Christianity will never die. Do I fear that Christianity disappears – my answer should be yes, but my faith does not allow me to say yes, because as long as we are alive, Christianity is alive. And it’s our responsibility to make it stay and grow bigger and bigger

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<sup>28</sup> Youth cited in this paragraph were interviewed in Krakow between 26 and 31 July, for their safety only their first names are given in the article.

says Vana from Iraq.

The message of support was repeated by many youth, which shows that solidarity among young Christians and Christian institutions is represented by a number of believers in the Middle East.

Peter Karam – director of Caritas Lebanon stressed:

We are not there to run away. Our history and mission, all the things related to what Christ gave us are to stay in the Middle East. Because that's where Christ was born. He was not born in Europe or in America or in Sydney, he was born in the Middle East and our mission is to stay there, to reinforce, to let them feel that they are supported.

## 4. SOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

When the human spirit finds itself in an extreme situation, courage and boldness are crucial for finding solutions to overcome crises. The confidence of young people in saving the region from extremists, that their senior conational do not always share, may make the fear of losing Christianity in the Middle East fade for a while. Yet goodwill of the youngsters is not sufficient here (nonetheless it is worth to stress that all of the pilgrims that joined WYD 2016 in Krakow came back on time to their countries, not willing to stay in Europe and seek asylum). This comes to a point that if they are to be the hope for the region – they need to be helped. This help should come on two levels – first – global – meaning military intervention and humanitarian help on a large scale. Second – local – meaning helping to connect smaller groups of young Christians so that they can start creating the web of contacts for their future actions as politicians, lawyers, journalists, doctors etc.

### 4.1. GLOBAL LEVEL ASSISTANCE

Military action in the region (“battle for Mosul”<sup>29</sup>) has started in October of 2016, in July 2017 Mosul was liberated by Iraqi forces.<sup>30</sup> Military intervention plan was, no doubt, facilitated by the declaration of American Secretary of State, John Kerry, who on March 16, 2016 officially recognised that ISIS is waging genocide against Christians, Yazidis, and Shiites in the areas under its control.

This is only the second time the U.S. government has condemned an on-going genocide.<sup>31</sup> The liberation of Mosul does not mean the region is safe though. The city is destroyed and unsecure and Christians (as of November 2017) not only from Mosul,

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/18/battle-for-mosul-day-two-isis-iraqi-kurdish> (28.10.2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/09/world/middleeast/mosul-isis-liberated.html> (29.11.017).

<sup>30</sup> D. Gavlak, *Assault on ISIS in Mosul expected to displace 1,5 million*, Crux, August 4, 2016, <https://cruxnow.com/cns/2016/08/04/assault-isis-mosul-expected-displace-1-5-million/> (04.08.2016).

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/432940/john-kerry-isis-genocide-declared> (4.08.2016). It is worth noting that Hillary Clinton while presidential candidate supported the idea of calling ISIS crimes



remain in IDP camps in Erbil and those from villages surrounding Mosul are only starting to come back to their home: as of August 2017, 5000 people – meaning 1000 families returned to their homes in the village of Qaraqosh, and this is only 10% out of 10 000 families (50 000 people) that were living in only this one village in 2014 when ISIS invaded the region.<sup>32</sup>

Hope can be restored from the military action provided by Western forces, but mostly it will be brought from the people who build their resistance on solidarity, love and mercy. Global scale help is conducted by big humanitarian organisations such as mentioned above Aid to the Church in Need, that are constantly trying to work on restoring order in the war-torn areas of Iraq and Syria and are still working on bringing Christians back to their houses. Christians in Iraq are also facing internal instability caused by the Kurdish independence referendum that took place in September 2017. U.S. adviser to the Chaldean Catholic Church, dr. Stephen Rasche warned that two millennia of Christianity in Iraq could be wiped out completely if war breaks out between Iraqi forces and Kurdish nationalists, following the referendum, as he recalled in a conversation with Catholic News Agency in Rome<sup>33</sup>:

the international community must act quickly to prevent a new conflict in Iraq following the Sept. 25 referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, where 93 percent of 3.3 million voters chose independence.

#### 4.2. LOCAL LEVEL SUPPORT

Gatherings like WYD are extraordinary occasions to bring people from all parts of the planet together, and to give visibility to some causes that deserve worldwide support. In fact, the biggest challenge for WYD organisers is not related to logistics, but rather to a legacy. It will be a waste of time and money to organize an event with 2,5 million people and with an intense media coverage (5,700 accredited journalists, among them 1,800 from 80 countries) if this “being together” does not transform the people but remain ephemeral.

Supporting young Christians in the Middle East could be the perfect legacy for World Youth Day 2016. Specifically, a local organisation in Krakow could be created to help the students, just like those that came to Krakow for the 2016 meeting to study in Europe along with their colleagues, create their own web of contacts and then, obligatory, come back to their countries and help rebuild them not only on an infrastructural, but a human level. The first step of creating such environment was Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow joining the network International Initiatives for Migrant and Refugee

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towards Christians genocide: <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/hillary-clinton-christian-genocide-217215> (15.10.2016).

<sup>32</sup> [http://pkwp.org/newsy/okolo\\_15\\_000\\_chrzescijan\\_powroci\\_do\\_swoich\\_domow\\_w\\_tym\\_miesiacu](http://pkwp.org/newsy/okolo_15_000_chrzescijan_powroci_do_swoich_domow_w_tym_miesiacu) (28.11.2017).

<sup>33</sup> <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/10/11/iraqi-kurdish-war-deadly-christians-warns-u-s-adviser/> (28.11.2017).

Education that was created in Rome in November 2017. The network aims to connect Universities that are conducting refugee and migrant education and those who are willing to learn the best practices from higher education institutions from all over the world.

Higher education given to the youth of the Middle East in European Universities (which Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow would help them with) would be a way not only to create an opportunity to finish the university for them (which many from places like Mosul are not having a chance to do). It is helping them psychologically to move on with their lives (strengthening their spirits and proving that what they studied in Iraq or Syria is not lost) and giving them a confidence with a European university grade, they might connect to their colleagues from different universities (or same one that they study), working on creating solutions for their lands in the future. This kind of education would no doubts need sufficient funds and proper programs to run, yet it is something to look for as the step into providing higher education to the people that might become political and social leaders in the Middle East in the future. No less important is the support of local European students – the web of international contact created in Humanities, Law or Medical departments will be paying back for many years in the future.

Educating a future Christian leadership in the region is also an important cause for the local higher education institutions in the Middle East. In October 2017 the Catholic University in Erbil obtained the formal recognition by Iraq's Ministry of Higher Education, becoming the first Catholic University in the Middle East's history.

## SUMMARY

Middle East Christians were for centuries proving that they can and they will resist persecution. The scale in which the latter is happening today in the region is recognised internationally as genocide – the crime of crimes that the world promised not to let happen ever again with international conventions. Young people from the Middle East give hope that in gruesome time for their war-torn region, the world might expect a better future in the region one day. All necessary needs shall be given to the people of Iraq and Syria to live again in peace and stability.

## INTERVIEWS

Msgr Basilio Yaldo, archbishop of Baghdad.

Marcela Szymanski, EU liason in Aid to the Church in Need.

Pilgrims coming from Iraq and Syria for World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow.

Peter Karam – director of Caritas Lebanon.

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