

Beat: Miscellaneous

Bombs targeting Christians on Christmas Day kill 49 in Baghdad

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USPA News - At least 49 people were killed and nearly 90 others were injured when bombs exploded outside a church and near a crowded outdoor market in Christian areas of Baghdad, police and medics said Wednesday as Christmas festivities took place in the Iraqi capital. The first attack happened when two bombs exploded at a popular Assyrian market in Dora district, a mostly Christian neighborhood in southern Baghdad.

The powerful explosions, which destroyed and damaged a number of shops at the crowded market, killed at least 35 people and injured 56 others. The attack on the outdoor market was followed minutes later by an explosion that happened outside the nearby Maria church as worshippers were leaving after finishing prayers. "The blast was caused by a parked car that was loaded with explosives," a police official said, putting the number of casualties at 14 dead and 31 injured. Other Christmas festivities in the capital took place without incident, but at least thirteen people were killed in three other attacks that did not appear to target Christians. One of those attacks happened south of Tikrit in Salah ad Din province when a motorcycle bomb exploded near a playground, killing four police officers and two civilians. The Church of England's spiritual leader, during his annual Christmas sermon, said Christian communities in the Middle East were "ever more seriously" threatened and made reference to Wednesday's attacks in Baghdad. He also condemned "injustices" in the Palestinian territories, Israel, and South Sudan. "Even this morning, a church in Baghdad, where there have been Christians since the 1st century, was bombed and [14] more people testified to their faith with their lives," the Archbishop of Canterbury said. "Christians in the region are attacked and massacred, driven into exile from an area in which their presence has always been central, undoubted, essential, richly contributing, and faithful." The deadliest attack against Christians since the Iraq war happened in October 2010 when a group of gunmen attacked the Our Lady of Salvation Church in the Karrada District of Baghdad, killing 58 people and injuring 78 others. The attack was claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), an armed insurgent group affiliated with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), that considers Christians to be "infidels" and a legitimate target in their Jihad. Violence in Iraq has declined dramatically since its peak in 2006 and 2007, but political turmoil and sectarian violence has been on the rise following the pullout of the last U.S. soldiers in mid-December 2011. At least 7,225 people are known to have died in violence across Iraq so far this year.

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