



Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County

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Rev. Will McGarvey, Executive Director

May 17, 2015

As leaders of interfaith organizations surrounding the San Francisco Bay, we add our voices to the call for an end to the genocidal attacks on Assyrians, Yezidis, and other religious minority groups in Northern Iraq. Our work in building peaceful relationships among the diverse religious communities of our own region reminds us again and again of the importance of religious freedom and mutual respect for all. We commend the efforts of the Assyrian Foundation of America and the Assyrian Aid Society in our own area to raise awareness of the impact of war and social disruption on Assyrian refugees in Iraq and beyond, and to offer aid, medical relief, and cultural support in that region.

We grieve to note that for too many years, minority groups have been suffering in that part of the world. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide during the First World War that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Assyrians, as well as Armenians, Greeks, and Yezidis. It would be sad enough to recall such events of a century ago, but they are not merely events of history; they are the headlines of today. Even now, over 200 Assyrians captured by Daesh in Syria in February are awaiting trial in Sharia court because of their faith and ethnicity. Among the 230 are 52 children. Hundreds of thousands of Assyrians have been driven from their homes in the region. The death toll is staggering and not fully known, women have been forced to convert and marry or forced into sexual slavery. Refugee camps have been opened in bordering countries.

The Yezidi have been faced with the ultimatum that they convert or be killed, but many who expressed a willingness to convert have been killed anyway. Driven from their homes, thousands have been slaughtered, women and girls have been sexually assaulted, forced to marry or become concubines, or sold as sexual slaves. As many as 2000 young boys have been forced to convert and trained as child soldiers.

We lament the suffering being experienced today by the Assyrian, Yezidi, and Shabak people of Northern Iraq. We call on our own communities of faith to become aware of the genocide taking place today. We call for prayers for the refugees and prayers for the hostages, and for prayers that we might all work together to help bring the conflict to an end, offer humanitarian aid to those affected, and move toward a peace in which all are given respect and freedom to exercise their religion. Let us all work together to create a more just and compassionate world.

In peace,

Linda Crawford, Executive Director, Interfaith Center at the Presidio
Rev. Carol Hovis, Executive Director, Marin Interfaith Council
Rev. Dr. Andrew Kille, Chair of the Board, Silicon Valley Interreligious Council
Rev. Will McGarvey, Executive Director, Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County
Michael Pappas, Executive Director, San Francisco Interfaith Council