

Hudson Institute

AUGUST 2016

# The ISIS Genocide of Middle Eastern Christian Minorities and Its *Jizya* Propaganda Ploy

NINA SHEA | DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



H

Hudson Institute

**The ISIS Genocide of Middle  
Eastern Christian Minorities  
and Its *Jizya* Propaganda Ploy**

Nina Shea  
Center for Religious Freedom



© 2016 Hudson Institute, Inc. All rights reserved.

For more information about obtaining additional copies of this or other Hudson Institute publications, please visit Hudson's website, [www.hudson.org](http://www.hudson.org)

#### ABOUT HUDSON INSTITUTE

Hudson Institute is a research organization promoting American leadership and global engagement for a secure, free, and prosperous future.

Founded in 1961 by strategist Herman Kahn, Hudson Institute challenges conventional thinking and helps manage strategic transitions to the future through interdisciplinary studies in defense, international relations, economics, health care, technology, culture, and law.

Hudson seeks to guide public policy makers and global leaders in government and business through a vigorous program of publications, conferences, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit [www.hudson.org](http://www.hudson.org) for more information.

#### **Hudson Institute**

1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20004

P: 202.974.2400  
[info@hudson.org](mailto:info@hudson.org)  
[www.hudson.org](http://www.hudson.org)

# Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Preface</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Executive Summary</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Jizya Payments in Exchange for Protection and Respect for Right to Religion</b> | <b>4</b>  |
| <i>Cases</i>   |           |
| Mosul and Nineveh, Iraq  | 6         |
| Raqqqa, Syria  | 12        |
| Qaryatayn, Syria   | 15        |
| Khabour, River Valley, Syria   | 17        |
| Idlib, Syria   | 28        |
| <b>Influence of ISIS Propaganda</b>  | <b>19</b> |
| <b>Conclusion</b>  | <b>22</b> |

## *Preface*

*We strongly request [you] to recognize what happened to us—Christians of Iraq and particularly of Mosul and [the Plain] of Nineveh—as genocide. Many of our people [have] been killed, [an] enormous number of them [have] been forced to leave their lands, property, work, and every possession, and others were taken as slaves.*

—Archbishop Amel Nona, Bishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church of Mosul, June 2014

That Christians are among the Middle Eastern minorities facing ISIS genocide was officially recognized earlier this year in a designation by the [U.S. secretary of state](#) and in resolutions of the [House of Representatives](#) and the [Senate](#). Yet some prominent voices disagree and assert that ISIS offers to protect and respect Christians through a *jizya* option, a traditional Islamic tax. Such assertions are unsubstantiated and so strikingly at odds with the evidence that this report was produced in response. Genocide is the most heinous human rights crime, and basic justice requires that assertions bearing directly on whether or not genocide has occurred be examined in depth.

Relying on the testimony of the region’s Christian leaders and of the Christians who encountered ISIS, on human rights documentation, and on other evidence, this report establishes why the Christian minority properly belongs on any list of those who have been targeted for genocide by ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.\* This evidence is substantial but incomplete, as the affected areas remain war zones. What we know has been pieced together largely from the testimonial evidence from a sample of the survivors. A comprehensive documentation of ISIS assaults against these Christians is still needed.

Christians belonging to the various Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches are certainly not the only religious community threatened in Iraq and Syria. Members of all religions—including Sunni Muslims who fail to conform to ISIS dictates—have been cruelly attacked and killed by members of the group. The secretary of state named the Yazidis and Shi’a Muslims, along with the Christian minority, in his designation. The congressional resolutions also include the Sabeans-Mandeans and Kaka’i.

Internationally, there is a growing consensus that the Yazidi community of Iraq’s Nineveh province, in particular, has been targeted for genocide by ISIS. This report does not in any way deny or detract from that assessment. Both Yazidis and Christians, as well as other minorities, have suffered from ISIS atrocities that have intentionally and entirely eradicated those communities from ISIS-controlled territory and thus fit the international definition of genocide. These attacks are religiously based. They are unprovoked as both the Christian and the Yazidi communities are politically marginalized in both Iraq and Syria and lacked military power and forces of their own.

Finally, it should be recognized, ISIS is not the only persecutor of these countries’ Christians. In this century, Iraqi Christians have been relentlessly targeted for death, hostage taking, and other brutality by al Qaeda in Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq, Shi’a militants and others since a coordinated bombing of their churches in Baghdad in 2004. Syria’s Christians have been deliberately attacked,

particularly by Jabhat al Nusra, the al Qaeda affiliate, since the beginning of the conflict in Syria in 2011. Some of the most egregious examples of this anti-Christian persecution —such as the kidnapping of Aleppo’s Greek and Syriac Orthodox archbishops, Boulos Yazigi and Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, and the 2010 suicide attack on a Baghdad Catholic church filled with worshippers— do not involve the issue of jizya. Therefore, they are not covered in this report. It does not attempt to address this larger record of violence by a range of actors, even though between 2003 and 2014, Iraq lost a million members of its Christian community when they were either killed or driven out. The purpose here is to show that the Christians are indeed suffering genocide at the hands of ISIS.

\*This terrorist organization also calls itself the Islamic State or IS and is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL, and *Daesh*.

\*\*UN [Convention](#) on Genocide (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948)

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.



### *Executive Summary*

Publications and videos by ISIS repeatedly assert its intent to destroy the Christian church—that is, all Christians under its control—and its pattern of attacks evidences such intent. Nevertheless, ISIS claims to offer Christians in some areas of its self-proclaimed caliphate an option to pay a traditional Islamic tax, or *jizya*, as an alternative to death, deportation, and forcible conversion. Superficially, ISIS may appear to have revived the medieval Islamic practice that provided limited toleration for the Jewish and Christian “People of the Book” and that was formally abandoned over a century and a half ago under the last Ottoman caliphate. Closer examination of all three cases where *jizya* was claimed to have been offered as an option, however, reveals that these ISIS claims are a deception or propaganda ploy. ISIS does not tolerate Christians. Its demands for payments from Christians, which it calls *jizya*, are actually extortion and ransom. ISIS has never given a traditional *jizya* option to any of these Christians at any time. Even when it extorts payments and calls them *jizya*, this always, within a short time, results in dispossession, rape, murder, kidnapping, and enslavement of Christians—all acts evidencing the crime of genocide.

Genocide is a crime of intent, one that requires the deliberate aim of destroying a group, such as a religious one, “in whole or in part.” In a recent report, the [Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#) (a body created by the UN Human Rights Council) denies that ISIS intends to destroy the Nineveh Christian community. It points to ISIS claims to offer a *jizya* option while overlooking contrary evidence, including other ISIS [declarations](#), such as, “We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women.” It makes a summary conclusion, without citing any supporting evidence, that ISIS recognizes the “right to exist as Christians,” including for those within its territory, “as long as they pay the *jizya* tax.” The Commission’s conclusion is demonstrably false.

In the [American debate](#) leading up to the U.S. government’s designation of genocide, the issue of *jizya* first came to be a central rationale for those within and outside the Obama administration who [argued](#) that Christians should be excluded from the designation. Based on unsupported claims that *jizya* arrangements were being implemented, some erroneously concluded that ISIS lacks the intent—required by the international Genocide Convention—to destroy the Iraqi and Syrian Christian community. Their argument, which ultimately did not prevail in the U.S. State Department’s genocide designation decision, depended on taking selective ISIS assertions about *jizya* at face value; ignoring the evidence in the purported cases of *jizya*; overlooking the obligations of the Islamic authorities under traditional *jizya* theory and assuming that ISIS adheres to traditional Islamic rules and practices; and assuming that ISIS can be trusted to honor its agreements with non-Muslims.

This report agrees with the official determination of the U.S. secretary of state and the resolutions of Congress that the Christians of Nineveh and of those areas of Syria under ISIS control have been among the religious minority groups facing ISIS genocide.

### ***Jizya Payments in Exchange for Protection and Respect for Right to Religion***

**J**izya is mentioned once in the Qur'an (9:29, Surah al-Tawbah), although no payment amount or details are actually given. Under what is known as the Pact of Omar (named after a seventh-century caliph), izya was an arrangement for coexistence with "People of the Book," *ahl al kitab*, meaning Jews and Christians, and even Sabean-Mandeans and Zoroastrians. A progressive tax was paid by men or their community in exchange for guarantees for their families: protection of their lives and property and the right to worship, receive the sacraments, and perform their religious rights. They did not have full religious freedom, were harshly discriminated against, and were compelled to adhere to Muslim mores in ways that were deliberately humiliating and onerous and would be seen today as flagrant violations of international human rights law. Yet this arrangement at least allowed the protected non-Muslim communities to assemble inside their houses of worship for communal prayer, led by their own religious leaders. For 1,300 years, from the region's Muslim conquest in the seventh century until the mid-nineteenth, Christianity was practiced and perpetuated in this region under such arrangements.

Those who conflate today's extortion and ransom payments demanded of Christians with a tax for jizya may lack knowledge about historical jizya and fail to understand the two obligations assumed by authorities in a jizya arrangement. The jizya payment was to be made in exchange for both protection of persons and property and for the right to non-Muslim religious worship. A [legal brief](#) prepared for the Philos Project—drawing on such sources as *Encyclopedia of Islam*, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, and *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*—succinctly describes such obligations:

Shortly after the founding of Islam, the Assyrian Christians came under Muslim rule. They were relegated to dhimmi status, and were required to pay the jizya. Under the historical Islamic caliphates, the jizya was a tax levied on their non-Muslim subjects, referred to as dhimmis. Historically, dhimmis were "the non-Muslims who live within Islamdom [who] have a regulated and protected status." *In return for protection and the right to continue practicing their religion*, and as a mark of their obedience, dhimmis were required to pay the jizya. If the Muslim ruler failed to provide the dhimmis adequate security, he was obliged to return the money, as the Egyptian sultan Saladin did after withdrawing his army from Syria. [Emphasis added.]

By contrast, there is no evidence that ISIS has fulfilled the caliphate's obligations under a jizya agreement. In fact, irrespective of any payment made to it by a Christian, ISIS prevents and punishes Christian worship, attacks the Christian and his family members, and steals the Christian's property. What ISIS refers to as "jizya" taxes are simply extortion and ransom payments that at most provide temporary protection from ISIS attacks. Virtually every Christian who can flees ISIS-controlled territory. The few aged, disabled, and other Christians who have stayed behind in ISIS-controlled areas have been forced to convert to Islam, become jihadi "brides," or been taken captive or killed. In invoking the term jizya, ISIS is providing a pretext to appear more authentically Islamic. Experts on ISIS have called this a "ploy" and a "publicity stunt." Both terms are accurate.



In March 2007, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the first leader of the Islamic State in Iraq, who took the title of commander of the faithful but did not claim the caliphate himself, proclaimed a policy to kill Christians and justified this in Islamist terms by [declaring](#) the contract for jizya to be null and void:

We find that the sects of the People of the Book and others from the Sabians and so in the State of Islam today are people of war who qualify for no protection, for they have transgressed against whatever they agreed to in many countless ways, and if they want peace and security then they must start a new era with the State of Islam according to (Caliph) Omar's stipulations [the historic "Covenant" of Caliph Omar with Christians] that they have annulled.

In February 2014, a few months before ISIS declared its Islamic State caliphate, it publicized a jizya contract with the Christian community of Raqqa. In June 2014, during its assault on Mosul's Christian community, ISIS announced that an offer of jizya was made to them. Subsequently, it announced jizya arrangements for Christian communities in several areas of Syria. These assertions misrepresented what actually occurred. As the 300-page [Genocide Against Christians in the Middle East Report](#) finds:

As used by ISIS, [jizya] is almost always a term for extortion and a prelude or postscript to ISIS violence against Christians. In Nineveh, demands for so-called jizya payments were a prelude to killings, kidnappings, rapes and the dispossession of the Christian population. . . . In Raqqa, the offer was made after ISIS had already closed the churches, burned bibles and kidnapped the town's priests.

The complete absence anywhere in ISIS-controlled territory of functioning churches, active clergy, and intact Christian communities is prime facie evidence that there was no jizya option for the Christians. Testimony and reports from the affected Christians reveal beyond doubt that there has been no jizya option, only lethally enforced demands for money, property, or women and girls as ransom and extortion payments, which ISIS calls "jizya."

A closer examination of the three principal cases – Mosul, Raqqa and Qaryatayn – as well as some other cases, in which ISIS claimed a jizya option follows.

## Mosul and Nineveh, Iraq

Soon after Saddam Hussein's overthrow, Sunni extremists made common cause with Hussein's military officers in Mosul. With their help, ISIS easily took control of the country's second largest city and Nineveh's capital on June 10, 2014, and it was from there that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the Islamic State caliphate a month later, on June 29. By late August 2014, Patriarch Ignatius Youssef III Younan of the Syriac Catholic Church, northern Iraq's largest church, had begun [pronouncing](#) the situation facing his now-displaced and brutalized flock to be "[genocide](#)."

On July 17, 2014, ISIS had summoned Christian leaders to meet with its representatives at an auditorium in Mosul for the stated purpose of announcing the *jizya* terms on which they could stay in the Islamic State's "caliphate." The Mosul Christians, who did not respond, were then given an ultimatum, announced from the loudspeakers of Mosul mosques, to leave by July 19 to avoid death or forced conversion to Islam. All but a few dozen fled or died trying to. This terror-driven mass exodus of Christians was repeated three weeks later throughout the rest of Nineveh Province. Since Nineveh was the historical homeland of Iraqi Christianity and the place to which many Iraqis had gone to escape persecution in the south of the country, this meant that by late August 2014, all but a small fraction of Iraqi Christians remained in Iraq, outside of Kurdistan, mostly in Baghdad.

The Christians who did not leave and have survived have been sometimes characterized as having chosen to live under ISIS and pay *jizya*. The major flaw in this description is that it overlooks the facts and omits the views of the Christian leaders most closely involved. The available evidence paints a more dire picture.

Rev. Emanuel Adelkello, the Syrian Catholic priest who directly dealt with ISIS over the fate of the one thousand Christians still in Mosul in late July 2014, wrote details about the "jizya option" in response to this author's inquiry. He related that ISIS demanded all remaining Christian leaders to gather at a Mosul civic center, purportedly to hear ISIS's *jizya* demand. After the Christian leaders throughout Nineveh consulted among themselves, they decided it was a "trap." As Father Adelkello explained, they feared that they were being rounded up for slaughter and that the women and girls would be jeopardized if their people remained under ISIS "protection." According to the priest's [statement](#), which was recorded, translated, and sent on March 5, 2016, by the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese of Erbil to this author:

The collective belief was that this gathering was not an attempt to negotiate, it was only going to be a demand at best, and a trap at worst. The Christians mostly believed they would likely be killed if they showed up. At the appointed time, no Christians showed up. Angered, ISIS then gave them two choices, leave or be killed. The remaining Christians then all left. At checkpoints on the way out of town they were robbed of everything of value, had all their family and property documents taken from them, and their cars stolen as well. Thus stripped, they were allowed to walk to the border with the Kurdistan Region.

Father Adelkello explained that Mosul's Christians had a deep dread of ISIS:

[Jizya] was only put forward initially as a ploy from which ISIS could keep the Christians there to further take advantage of them and abuse them. There was specific concern that

the intention was to keep women there so that they could be taken freely by the ISIS fighters. The ISIS fighters had made public statements that according to the Koran it was their right to take the Christian women as they pleased.

An estimated twenty-five to fifty Christians remained behind in Mosul, a city of over a million residents, and church leaders are adamant that there is no jizya agreement for them and that they are badly treated. Some have been killed, while some of the elderly have [reportedly](#) died of neglect in their houses, allowed to starve to death or deprived of medications, and with no one to bury them. The others have been enslaved or forcibly converted to Islam.

Mosul clergy who had direct engagement with ISIS in July 2014 state that there was never a serious option for Nineveh's Christians to pay jizya to avoid ISIS atrocities. They believe that ISIS never had any intention of protecting Christians or of allowing Christian worship.

Syriac Catholic archbishop Yohanna Petros Moshi writes that the Christians of northern Iraq determined they "can never trust Daesh [supporters] no matter how many good intentions they try to show." It should be noted that Western policymakers mistrust ISIS, too. (The archbishop, along with virtually all of his flock, is now dispossessed and displaced.)

Archbishop Moshi states that their suspicions that ISIS was plotting against the Christians were confirmed on the second day after the failed meeting, when ISIS falsely publicized that a jizya agreement had been reached with him. He rejects the ISIS claims in no uncertain terms, calling them a "lie" that the Christians leaders believed was intended to trick the Christian laity into staying so that ISIS could kill the men and abduct the women. He writes:

[ISIS] released a statement saying that the meeting has taken place between representatives of the Islamic State and Christian religious leaders, and the document has been signed by the Iraqi chief of priests [Archbishop Moshi]. [This] was a lie made up in order to encourage Christians to stay so they [could] take their revenge from their men and use the women same as what happened to the Yazidis.

Archbishop Moshi states that after the Christians fled, ISIS representatives taunted them about the jihadis' desire for the Christian women, thus validating the Christians' fears:

One of them [called a] few of our sons to tell them: "Unfortunately! You managed to run away! Because you have such beautiful daughters and women."

The Chaldean Catholic patriarch Louis Raphael Sako, who was among the Mosul refugees, categorically states that no Christian community, or even family, remains in Mosul to pay jizya. He disputes Kurdish media reports that families in Mosul are paying an annual jizya of \$170. In a May 11, 2016, letter to the international Catholic press, the Patriarchate asserted:

There are no more Christian families in Mosul... only a few individuals who were unable to escape... [In Mosul,] 50 disabled Christians are left at a medical facility because they were unable to escape... [and] it has been impossible so far to rescue them. Some Christians abducted by Daesh are still being held, but no family.

Other diverse Christian voices are consistent on this point. The Assyrian Iraqi parliamentarian Yonadam Kanna reports that the Christians who remained in Mosul, largely due to old age or disabilities, were forced to convert to Islam. Father Douglas Bazi, an Iraqi Chaldean priest who ran a refugee camp in the Iraqi Kurdistan capital of Erbil, says that one Mosul family with disabled members was told they could remain Christian if each family member paid \$8,000 each month. This was exorbitant, and thus they could not exercise this ISIS “option.” Other church leaders, now in exile in Kurdistan, state that those Christians who were left behind in Mosul are indigent, starving and dying from neglect, and do not pay jizya or attend church, since there are no churches or monasteries, ISIS having destroyed, closed or repurposed all of them.

After the Nineveh Christian leadership made clear that it viewed the jizya offer as a ruse, ISIS showed no mercy to those Christians whom it encountered when it stormed the province in the first two weeks of August 2014.

Christians who remained in Nineveh after ISIS arrived and did not convert to Islam met grim fates. Some were killed outright. Patriarch Younan [reports](#) that ISIS has killed over a thousand Christians in Syria and over five hundred Christians in Iraq. Using a questionnaire devised by the State Department for documenting the Darfur genocide a decade ago, the Knights of Columbus gathered information from several hundred of the Nineveh Christian survivors in Kurdistan in March 2016. In case after case, a son, two cousins, a father, or a brother is reported missing after being led away by ISIS jihadists. Based on relatives’ testimony collected in Erbil, Knights of Columbus lawyer Scott Lloyd reported: “Dozens and perhaps hundreds of Christians, mostly men, were demanded as hostages in exchange for their families to leave. They haven’t been seen since.”

The press reported, based on the account of a Sunni tribesman, that in May 2015, an eighty-year-old Nineveh Christian woman was burned alive for not following ISIS sharia. His Eminence Theodore McCarrick, Washington, DC’s archbishop emeritus cardinal, related to this author that in early 2016, he spoke with an Iraqi Christian woman, now displaced in Kurdistan, who witnessed jihadists crucifying her husband to the front door of their home (this report was confirmed independently by Iraqi Catholic priest Father Denkha Joola, who aided the refugees and knows that woman). The parents and brothers of one girl fled by car but never reappeared, reported Georgina, their daughter who escaped with the grandmother in a separate car [statement to the American Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation]; they are presumed to have been murdered at a checkpoint by ISIS militants.

The Most Rev. Amel Nona, who was then Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Mosul, wrote an open letter (on file at the Knights of Columbus offices) stating that those who could not get out of Nineveh during when ISIS stormed through it were either killed or enslaved. He gives an example of four children from a family in his diocese, from the city of Qaraqosh—ages 4, 6, 8, and 15—who were killed. He “confirms” that a “huge number of Christians” from Mosul and the Nineveh Plain were also killed.

While ISIS sexual enslavement of women and girls has been mostly associated with the Yazidis, thousands of whom were captured, an unknown but smaller number of Christians was also enslaved. Another Nineveh family who did not leave before ISIS arrived, due to the father’s blindness, had their three-year-old daughter, Christina Noah, taken from them by ISIS militants.

From a cell phone call from another captured Christian woman, as reported in a *New York Times* magazine cover story, they learned that both were being detained in a holding pen with other women and girls and sold at a Mosul slave market. In the following months, ISIS would publish a price list for the sale of specifically Christian and Yazidi female slaves in slave markets, with those aged 1–9 being the most expensive; this price list was authenticated by the UN expert for sexual violence in conflict, Zainab Bangura. In another case, a mother relates that after her daughter was told by ISIS to get into a separate vehicle, she never saw her again. After three months without word, in the refugee camp, she received a call from the daughter saying that she had “converted” to Islam and “married” a Muslim man.

Archbishop Nona states he knows of “many” young girls who were taken from Nineveh by ISIS and that their whereabouts are unknown. Syriac Catholic archbishop Moshi states, in a letter on file at the Hudson Institute, that, in all, over twenty Christian girls and women were captured and most have not been seen since, despite church ransom offers:

Weeks after the displacement, we had indirect communication with Daesh members in order to save more than 20 women whom stayed and are hostages, they confirmed that they were in good conditions. A 3 years old girl, a 25 years old girl, a 30 years old young woman and other girls and women aging from 40 to 70 years old. We agreed to pay a ransom not a *Jizya*, which was 30 thousand dollars in exchange for their release. Conditioning that we don’t pay anything until we guarantee their arrival, at least the arrival of the small girl, the other girl and the young woman. But that didn’t happen until this day. And today we know nothing about them or what happened to them.

At least one has escaped. The horrific story of a Christian mother who escaped ISIS enslavement is recounted in [\*No Way Home: Iraq’s Minorities on the Verge of Disappearance\*](#), the June 2016 report of the UK-based Minority Rights Group International. She attests that as an ISIS captive she was brutally tortured and then taken to a sex slave detention center under the direction of an ISIS sheikh who performed “marriages” between the captive Christian and Yazidi girls and women and ISIS fighters, in accordance with strict ISIS religious rules. She stated:

That night I was married to eight different men and divorced eight times. Each man raped me three or four times. When all this was over, we were taken back to the room where all the girls were being held. They made us walk naked through the big room where all the men were sitting. We were barely able to walk. This scenario was repeated every week—it was like a nightmare.

*World* magazine editor Mindy Belz interviewed Christians from Nineveh who fled ISIS. In her book, *They Say We Are Infidels*, she writes that in the major Christian city of Qaraqosh, some one hundred Christians, who were initially left behind, were held hostage in their homes. She relates: “One father described being tortured while his wife and two children were threatened after the family refused to deny their faith.” In another Christian family, the mother and twelve-year-old daughter were raped by ISIS militants, causing the father, who was forced to watch, to commit suicide. Father Bazi says that many of the girls and women have been raped but shame prevents them from talking about it.

Some reported being tortured in attempts to force them to convert. Forced conversion to Islam was so prevalent that there are now special ministries by Iraqi churches and clergy in Kurdistan to counsel those who escaped and are burdened by the guilt of having renounced their faith even though they did so with a knife blade at their children's neck or their own.

In September 2014, a family of twelve Assyrian Christians, trapped in their Nineveh hometown of Bartella after ISIS swept in the previous month, escaped after being robbed and forcibly converted to Islam. The press [told](#) their story as follows:

The Assyrians said for the first three days they were given food by ISIS but for the next 17 days after they were given nothing. They survived from whatever they had in the house. ISIS stole all their money and their papers. They were brought to an Islamic court in Mosul where they “converted” and were given an Islamic state ID and then returned to Bartella. They said they saw one Assyrian who had not converted and was badly beaten, his hands were tied behind his back and he was driven off in a truck. They assumed that he was killed.

In another case a group of men [reportedly](#) converted when jihadists threatened to rape the girls:

There was Khalia, a woman in her fifties, who was captured and held hostage along with 47 others. During her 15 days in captivity, she rebuffed demands to convert, despite a gun being put to her head and a sword to her neck. She literally fought off ISIS militants as they tried to rape the girls, and again later when they tried to take a 9-year-old as a bride. Because of the abuse, 14 men gave in to ISIS' demands and said they would convert to Islam. Khalia would not. Ultimately, the hostages were left in the desert to walk to Erbil. Others in Kurdistan affirmed without prompting that “she had saved many people.”

The vast majority of Nineveh's Christians, like the vast majority of Yazidis, fled to Iraq's Kurdistan region or neighboring countries. What few possessions and wealth the Christian families were able to pack were stolen from them by ISIS at checkpoints along the way out. A Sunni imam of Mosul protested their treatment and was killed by ISIS.

With cars and bus fare stolen by ISIS militants, many had to walk through miles of desert-like terrain in 120-degree-Fahrenheit temperatures without water or food. They carried only the small children and pushed the grandparents in wheelchairs. Those who glanced back could see armed groups looting their homes and loading the booty onto trucks. Some who were sick or weak did not survive. Church leaders told a Knights of Columbus researcher that the toll from this death march is not known and that those who fell dead along the way were left there in the panic. Others died from stress-related diseases shortly after becoming refugees. Iraqi Dominican sister Diana Momeka reports that a dozen of the elderly nuns from her convent died within the first year of exile from Nineveh. Those with cancers and other serious conditions now struggle to survive as destitute refugees in the face of grossly inadequate medical services.

Mosul's Christians (some 35,000, [according to reports](#) that quote Patriarch Sako, though other estimates are a fraction of that) first fled in June, and then a second wave left in late July for the large Christian town of Qaraqosh, about eighteen miles away, and other Nineveh villages, where they doubled up with relatives or sought shelter in schools, churches, and monasteries. That



summer, the ISIS leadership in Mosul turned off the water supply to some of these Christian places in Nineveh, explaining that they did not deserve to drink.

Christian leaders, perceiving an impending ISIS offensive against the rest of Nineveh, pleaded for help. In late June 2014, Archbishop Moshi issued a dramatic appeal to the international community for urgent protection for his people in Qaraqosh:

I appeal to the consciences of political leaders around the world, to international organizations and to all men of good will: it is necessary to intervene immediately to put a stop to the deterioration of the situation, working not only at a humanitarian level, but also politically and diplomatically. Every hour, every day lost, is likely to make all unrecoverable. Inaction becomes complicity with crime and abuse of power. The world cannot turn a blind eye to the tragedy of people who have fled from their homes in a few hours, taking with them only the clothes they are wearing.

The archbishop's pleas went unheeded. By the second week of August, ISIS had confiscated Christian homes and businesses in Mosul, after marking them with the red letter nun, the Arabic equivalent of N, for Nazarene, and consolidated its control over all of Nineveh province. Virtually the entire Christian population, some one hundred twenty thousand recent exiles from Mosul and the residents of the Nineveh Plain, was forced to flee, this time mainly to Kurdistan, and also to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Seeking shelter and aid, they flocked to the local churches, which were utterly unprepared to receive them. For months the exiled Christian families lived out in the open, under plastic tarps or in abandoned buildings and, during that first winter in 2014, were gradually moved into seven-foot-wide shipping containers, where thousands still remain. Two years later the local churches and international aid groups continue to provide all their food, clothing, medicine and, to the extent it exists, education, since they lack resettlement rights even in Iraqi Kurdistan and find the UN camps to be too dangerous for them.

ISIS treatment of the Christian community in Mosul and Nineveh is aptly [described](#) by Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, a former State Department counterterrorism expert, as an “extinction,” with ISIS labeling Christians “polytheists” (representatives of *shirk*), not “People of the Book.”

## Raqqa, Syria

What happened in Raqqa, the capital of the Islamic State, is upheld as the prime example of ISIS offering a jizya option to Christians. Only a few dozen Christian families remained in Raqqa at the time ISIS raised the jizya issue, its militants having captured the city from Jabhat al Nusra (al Qaeda) in mid-2013. In early 2014, ISIS gave Raqqa's Christians an ultimatum: they could either sign a written order to pay jizya and abide by a list of restrictions regarding the practice of their faith or be considered combatants and put to "the sword." The order [was posted](#) on the Internet in February 2014, bearing the blurred-out signatures of only some twenty Christians of that city and it received wide international coverage. It turned out to be a cover for an extortion racket against the few scattered and most elderly Christians remaining. The Raqqa Christians who have been paying ISIS, far from being protected, are now being used by ISIS as human shields and never have had a chance to exercise their religious rights.

Under the purported jizya arrangement, Christian men were required to pay ISIS, in gold, in amounts equivalent to one month of the average Raqqa salary, later raised to three months. In exchange, they were to receive the "protection of the Prophet" and would not be harmed.

The written order, a purported dhimmi contract, presumed the existence of functioning churches, with its detailed list of things forbidden to the churches, such as ringing bells, displaying crosses, making repairs, and holding wedding and funeral processions outside church walls.

In fact, ISIS had quickly set about destroying and shutting down all the churches, and none remained open after the caliphate was announced in July 2014. The last cleric left when ISIS arrived. It is in Raqqa that the Italian Jesuit, Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, was presumably murdered by jihadis in July 2013.

Currently, only a few dozen older Christians remain in Raqqa and, without churches or priests, they have no ability to worship as Christians. They are not allowed to leave the city and are being kept under house arrest, according to [reports](#) in spring 2016. Moreover, far from being provided "protection," these Christians, according to [news reports](#), are being used by ISIS as human shields as rebels and foreign forces strike the city.

In an article on Armenians in Syria, [Voice of America](#) quotes Ara Sisserian, an advocate for Syrian Christian refugees in Armenia: "With the rise of extremists, being a non-Muslim minority is the last thing you want to be in Syria now." The article explains, "In areas under control of the Islamic State, Armenians face increased peril." It mentions purported jizya arrangements but then states:

IS has also confiscated their land and used them as human shields to deter international coalition and Syrian warplanes from hitting its positions in Raqqa and elsewhere.

The touted "jizya" arrangement proved to be a deception: The Raqqa document was actually a protection contract for extortion, for there simply was no practical way for Christians to worship as Christians after being left without churches or priests, and, rather than being protected, the two dozen or so elderly Christians were subjected to house arrest and used as human shields. Though the State Department acknowledged there were no churches left open, it too (prior to its finding of

genocide) repeated the ISIS propaganda that Christians were given a jizya option: “Former residents of Raqqa estimated there were no more than 30 Christians left in Raqqa City, paying an unknown amount in protection taxes (jizya), and without access to public places of worship.”

Ambassador Fernandez [observed](#) the following about Raqqa:

After burning Christian books, destroying churches, and kidnapping priests in Raqqa in 2013, ISIS then publicized, in February 2014, a new dhimmi pact with Christians in Raqqa State. The announcement received considerable attention in international media, but there is little evidence that there was much of a Christian community to form the pact with. Although the agreement includes the standard language of “not building a church, monastery or monk’s hermitage,” there is no evidence that any existing churches actually remained open or in Christian hands, much less that anyone would want to build any. Indeed, there are no images whatsoever of what could be described as normal Christian life in ISIS-controlled territory – no functioning churches, no monasteries or working priests, and no Christian families or Christian schools – all of which had existed throughout Islamic history.

He explains that ISIS may have raised the jizya issue as a “publicity stunt” in order to appear more Islamic:

The pact seems more aspirational, and more about preparing the stage for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s assuming the mantle of the Caliph, which happened only four months later, than a real document regulating the life of an actual community. Just as the Caliph Omar in the 7th century produced an agreement to regulate the life of a protected minority, so would the Caliph-in-Waiting do the same. The only thing missing were actual Christians.

The respected outlet “Raqqa is Being Silently Slaughtered,” which monitors ISIS in Raqqa, too, repeats the jizya term but [makes clear](#) that these payments did not spare the city’s Christian minority from brutal ISIS bigotry. “Christians are the most vulnerable group in the country,” said Hussam Issa, a member of the group.

John, a college student, was one of the Christians who remained in Raqqa after ISIS seized it. After finally escaping in early 2016, he [related](#) that he managed to survive for eighteen months by carrying an official ISIS protection document he obtained by making extortion payments to ISIS, which he mistakenly called a jizya tax, using ISIS’s terminology. Despite the protection payments, he lived in “constant fear,” was forced to conform to ISIS haircut and dress codes and behavior rules, and while he was able to meet socially with other Christians, he had no ability to go to church or receive the sacraments.

John relates how he once watched a street demonstration with crowds shouting “Allahu Akbar” (Allah is the greatest): “I didn’t shout it – I am a Christian. But when an IS [Islamic State] man saw me being silent, he stopped the car. I had to say ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ too.” Eventually one night in early 2016, John made his escape in secrecy. He said he was the last young Christian to leave Raqqa.

Christian girls and women faced a much harder time than even John did in ISIS-controlled Raqqa. ISIS defectors [report](#) that the rape of Christian “infidels” was common and approved by the ISIS sharia court. Some were girls as young as twelve years old.

Despite payments to ISIS, the two dozen older Christians remaining in Raqqa are reportedly under house arrest or serving ISIS as human shields at this writing. They have no freedom to practice their Christian faith.

## Qaryatayn, Syria

Another “jizya offer” was [reported](#) in Qaryatayn, Syria, involving some three hundred Syriac Orthodox and Catholic men, women, and children who were taken hostage by ISIS on August 6, 2015. News reports announced that on September 4, 2015, they were “released,” returned to their homes, and confined there under a jizya arrangement ordered by an Islamic State sharia court. The terms were similar to those in Raqqa. The actual circumstances of the Christians under ISIS control there were revealed after Qaryatayn’s liberation in April 2016, and they sharply differed from those claimed by ISIS and repeated in the media.

The ISIS [propaganda campaign](#) surrounding the signing of a dhimmi contract in Qaryatayn was extensive, as detailed by MEMRI, the Middle East Media Research Institute:

On October 3, 2015, the information office of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Damascus Province posted a five-minute video titled “[Fight Those Who Do Not Believe In Allah] Until They Give The Jizya Willingly While They Are Humbled” (from Koran 9:29). The video, posted on Archive.org and disseminated via social media, including on Twitter under the Damascus Province hashtag, deals with ISIS’s imposition of a dhimma contract and the jizya poll tax on the Christian residents of the city of Qaryatayn, Syria, which it recently conquered. The video is accompanied by footage of ISIS removing crosses from churches and destroying them, as well as video of the signing of the contract.

In a translation by MEMRI, the narrator of the ISIS video explains:

The Caliph of the Muslims displayed kindness and generosity, and agreed to accept their jizya tax, and to allow them to live under the rule of the Caliphate as part of the dhimma contract. He also gave the Christians who fled the town an opportunity to return to their homes and fields within a month from the signing of the dhimma contract.

He warns that if the Christians stay and refuse to make the payments to ISIS, the orders are for “the men to be killed and the women and children to be enslaved.”

Apparently many of the Christians who were originally taken away were allowed to return to the town after being ransomed by their relatives, though some still remain missing. That fall, Syriac Orthodox archbishop Jean Kawak [attested](#) that the Christians who made the jizya payments were being “treated like slaves” and “third-class citizens.” He said they were held there against their will in a form of house arrest. The facts revealed in April 2016 following the liberation of the town by Russian-backed Syrian troops support the archbishop’s assessment.

Syriac Orthodox patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II [reported](#) that ISIS from the start subjected the town’s Christians to abuse and violence. He said that twenty-one were killed trying to escape or refusing to convert to Islam or submit to the “caliphate” rules.

All had been forced to sign the “agreement” to make payments to ISIS in order not to be killed. However, the community was never able to assemble and worship as Christians or live anything resembling a normal life. The Christians lived in constant fear and torment. Furthermore, the

militants also reportedly were plotting to take the Christian girls as “slaves.” In early September, three of the Christians were taken as hostages to Raqqa and according to reports, were killed. On September 22, 2015, another Christian was murdered by jihadists on charges of blasphemy, allegedly because he was overheard cursing by Muslims while they were working together in a vineyard.

In October 2015, with the help of Muslim friends, the Christians set up an underground railroad and began escaping in small groups to Homs, to areas under Syrian army control. The community decided to send out the young girls first, after being [warned](#) that jihadi leaders desired them as “wives.”

The escaping Christians left on foot and used a farm along the way as a logistics stop on the underground railroad, which was manned by five Christians and six Muslims, all of whom were killed in December by an armed group. After the first escape, the jihadists seized ten young Christian men and threatened to kill them unless they converted to Islam, which they did.

Father Jacques Mourad, a Syriac Catholic priest, was the prior of the historic fifth-century Mar Elian monastery in Qaryatayn, where he led a Christian-Muslim dialogue and sheltered war refugees from both religions. In May 2015, he, along with Deacon Boulos, [was captured](#) by ISIS and for five months, confined in a 19-by-10-foot bathroom where they had no electricity or contact with the outside world. The two prisoners were given rice and water twice daily. Three times during their captivity, they were given tea. They were threatened with beheading if they did not convert, and Father Mourad was beaten with a plastic hose. On October 10, 2016, with the help of a Muslim friend and dressed as a Muslim, Father Mourad escaped on a motorcycle.

Qaryatayn, which once had thirty thousand inhabitants, of which up to two thousand were Christians, has long been a symbol of religious coexistence. Today it is a ghost town, in ruins. Father Murad’s 1,500-year-old monastery, which housed the relics of St. Elian, martyred by the Romans for refusing to renounce his faith, was bulldozed by ISIS jihadists. Soon after Qaryatayn’s liberation, a Christian delegation visited the area and reported to AsiaNews.it.com on the “total devastation” of the church, monastery, and center for pilgrims. According to the local priest, Father Michel Noman, a group of the town’s Christians was captured by ISIS and negotiations for their release are ongoing. “We do not even know for sure if they are still alive, or dead,” the priest stressed.

In Qaryatayn, the Christian community received neither protection nor the right to Christian worship in exchange for their payments. Some were killed, others taken captive, and others held in the town against their will, while other risked their own lives and the lives of those who helped them in order to escape impending sexual slavery. Yet ISIS insisted on calling their forced payments “jizya” and made a propaganda show of their signing a dhimmi contract.



### **Khabour River Valley, Syria**

On February 23, 2015, ISIS stormed through some thirty-five Christian villages in the Khabour River Valley in Syria's Hassaka Province and [abducted](#) as hostages 230 Assyrian Christian men, women, and children. They detained them in an undisclosed area, away from their villages, until millions of dollars were paid by their church. This, too, was deceptively framed by ISIS as an Islamic "tax" on Christians.

At first, the militants demanded the impossible sum of \$23 million, later reduced to \$10 million, from the Assyrian Church of the East for their release. After an undisclosed amount was handed over to ISIS, the last forty-three surviving members of this group were freed a year later, on February 22, 2016. The captives had been released in small groups throughout the year, presumably after ransom money was raised and paid. During their captivity, the Christians were held incommunicado as prisoners, and were deprived of basic religious and other human rights.

While in captivity, three Christian men from this group [were shown](#) in an ISIS video, dressed in orange jumpsuits, kneeling in a desert landscape, identifying themselves as Nazarenes, or Christians, and were executed at point-blank range by gunshot to the back of their heads. Three more men from this group of hostages, also dressed in orange jumpsuits, were then shown kneeling behind the three fallen bodies, identifying themselves as Nazarenes and stating they would be killed next unless payments were made. These murders occurred on September 23, 2015.

Finally, as the Assyrian Human Rights Network [reported](#), the surviving Khabour Christians gained their freedom following an order by an ISIS sharia court that they pay an amount of money "levied as a tax on non-Muslims." Though this was labelled a religious "tax," this incident can only be understood as a large-scale hostage case.

## Idlib, Syria

Various other actors demand “jizya” payments from members of the Christian minority in the Middle East. Some claim to represent ISIS and others do not, but their demands, like those of ISIS, come with no guarantees for either physical protection or respect for religious rights.

For example, Iraqi Christian families living as refugees outside Amman, Jordan, periodically receive knocks on the door at night from men who say they are members of ISIS and demand a jizya tax for protection. If the family has no money (since ISIS in Iraq has already taken everything they own), these men then demand the daughters. In such cases, both Canon Andrew White’s American Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East, which supports refugee families, and local churches have helped to immediately relocate them within Jordan.

Another example occurred in Syria before ISIS surfaced. Syrian Christian refugees told Dutch blogger Martin Janssen that the thirty Christian families from their village near Idlib were confronted with so-called “jizya” demands in 2012. The sums demanded quickly increased and soon proved so ruinous that some of the Christians fled, leaving behind their property, while others converted to Islam in order to escape enslavement or death. There was no evidence they were ever allowed to worship as Christians from the time the protection payments were demanded. While this case preceded ISIS, it provides insight into the extortion system that ISIS and other jihadist groups call jizya.

One of Janssen’s [accounts](#), translated by the Rev. Mark Durie, the renowned Australian linguist, writer, and Anglican priest, follows:

Jamil [an elderly man] lived in a village near Idlib where 30 Christian families had always lived peacefully alongside some 200 Sunni families. That changed dramatically in the summer of 2012. One Friday trucks appeared in the village with heavily armed and bearded strangers who did not know anyone in the village. They began to drive through the village with a loud speaker broadcasting the message that their village was now part of an Islamic emirate and Muslim women were henceforth to dress in accordance with the provisions of the Islamic Shariah. Christians were given four choices. They could convert to Islam and renounce their ‘idolatry.’ If they refused they were allowed to remain on condition that they pay the jizya. . . . For Christians who refused there remained two choices: they could leave behind all their property or they would be slain. The word that was used for the latter in Arabic (dhabaha) refers to the ritual slaughter of sacrificial animals.

The man told Janssen that his and a number of other families began making the payments, but that after the amount demanded kept increasing over several months, the Christians fled, leaving behind their farms and property. Some who could not pay or escape were forced to convert to Islam. In the end, no Christians were able to survive as Christians.

### *Influence of ISIS Propaganda*

The myth of an ISIS *jizya* option for Christians has been uncritically repeated in the international media, [reported](#) by the widely cited Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Kurdish press, and others. Two reports that assert the existence of an ISIS *jizya* option—the November 2015 report, [Our Generation is Gone](#), by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, which is a congressionally established entity, and the June 2016 report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic—do so in the sensitive context of evaluating ISIS genocide. None of these sources has subjected the ISIS *jizya* claims to critical examination, even though some of them also present facts that would seem to refute such claims.

The erroneous conclusion on this point by the [Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria](#) in its report [“They Came to Destroy”: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis](#) is particularly disappointing. The commission, established in 2011 as an advisor to the world’s preeminent human rights body, The United Nations Council on Human Rights, is considered a highly respected authority internationally. It counts among its only four commissioners such notables as Karen Koning AbuZayd, an American who served as deputy commissioner general of UNRWA, a [controversial](#) UN body for Palestinian refugees with a reputation, including during her tenure, of [abetting Holocaust denial](#) and  [Hamas terror](#), but one that allowed her to obtain the rank of UN under secretary general.

The only discussion of Christians in the commission’s report is contained in the summary conclusion, below, and is not accompanied by any supporting facts, citations, or analysis of the alleged ISIS *jizya* option for Christians. It takes ISIS propaganda on *jizya* at face value and is premised on a belief that ISIS practices traditional Islam and can be trusted. It misleadingly asserts that there are “Christian communities still living under ISIS,” when, all the evidence proves that their communities have been shattered and the individual Christians who remain are captives or slaves or have been forced to become Muslims. It confidently but erroneously declares that ISIS unconditionally recognizes “their right to exist as Christians . . . as long as they pay the *jizya* tax,” since they are respected as “People of the Book.” It declares that the Christians “are vulnerable to attack” by ISIS essentially for a limited political, not religious, reason – if they get too close to the “non-aligned forces.” It stops short of repeating, though, ISIS’ proclamation of the “kindness and generosity” of al Baghdadi for allowing the *jizya* option.

While the Christian communities still living in ISIS-controlled territory live difficult and often precarious existences, are viewed with suspicion, and are vulnerable to attack if ISIS perceive they are seeking protection from non-aligned forces, their right to exist as Christians within any Islamic state existing at any point in time, is recognised as long as they pay the *jizya* tax. Under ISIS’s radical interpretation of Islam, however, it is impermissible for Yazidis to live as Yazidis inside its so-called caliphate because they are not People of the Book.

Though the commission cites no sources at all for this conclusion, it may have been influenced by the report of the Holocaust Museum’s office of genocide prevention, which is cited elsewhere in the commission’s report. The museum report incorrectly asserts that Nineveh Christians in the

summer of 2014 were “given the option to pay a jizya or leave” and observes that “under IS ideology,” “Christians and Jews” are respected as “people of the book,” and are not to be killed. This appears to be based on a premise -- that ISIS practices traditional Islam within its self-declared caliphate,” -- since there is no proof given for those assertions and all the evidence refutes them. The only Christian quoted in the museum report directly contradicts this, saying that ISIS refused to accept a jizya payment from him when he tried to make it, and he had to flee for his life. How, then, does the museum report source such claims? “IS specifically notes” them, states the museum report.

The museum report also fails to critically examine or respond to the purported ISIS statement to the Nineveh Christian that “we wanted to meet with your priests and they said no.” If its authors de-briefed any of the Nineveh Christian authorities, they do not cite them nor do they convey the deep mistrust they had of ISIS and the reasons for it.

The museum report implies that the Christian clergy needlessly feared and mistrusted ISIS, and that their failure to attend the terror group’s meeting in Mosul, on July 17, 2014, to accept the “option” they “were given” by ISIS was a missed opportunity and, so rude, it may have alienated al Baghdadi:

It is unknown whether Christians who were given the option to pay a jizya or leave, instead of convert or face death, would still be given this option should they return now.

It is unfortunate that this reporting on the Christian minority falls short of the U.S. Holocaust Museum’s otherwise high standard of work.

These findings were refuted during the [American debate](#) leading up to the official U.S. genocide designation last spring and laid to rest by the Secretary of State. Their revival by the commission of inquiry gives what is essentially unexamined ISIS propaganda new currency in international circles, with significant implications. The commission of inquiry report is already being cited as an important authority regarding ISIS’ treatment of Christians. For example, a July 15, 2016, briefing paper on [Religious Persecution in the Middle East and Its Effect on the UK](#) of the research library of the British Parliament cites the commission report as its principal source for its erroneous assertion that ISIS tolerates Christians as “People of the Book” who can avail themselves of the ultra-violent terror group’s “offer” of a “jizya option.” If allowed to stand unchallenged, the commission’s conclusion concerning the Christians can be expected to influence policy making within and outside of the United Nations.

Yet there is ample evidence that ISIS killed and terrorized Christians with the intent to eradicate that minority community, in whole or in part: the 2015 ISIS videos of the executions of Coptic Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians carried out by the Libyan branch of ISIS; the ISIS video of its killing of the Khabour Valley Christians; the testimony of Patriarch Younan and other Christian leaders; the testimony of many refugees; the documentation presented in the March 9, 2016, [Genocide against Christians in the Middle East Report](#), and numerous other sources. The jizya assertion by the commission’s report is simply false. In assuming that ISIS ideology tracks traditional Islamic rules and ideology in its treatment of minorities, such reporting does a disservice to the larger Muslim community as well as to the afflicted Christians.

The [Minority Rights Group International report](#) also asserts there was a *jizya* option in Nineveh, not only for Christians but even for some minorities in the Yazidi city of Sinjar. It makes the critically important acknowledgement, however, that such an “option” is actually a “protection racket” that is enforced with death or captivity:

Non-Muslims under ISIS control also contend with the *jizya*, a per capita religious tax levied on non-Muslim permanent residents under Islamic law. ISIS uses the *jizya* where possible to run a protection racket. Its evasion has led to serious consequences, such as abduction of female members of the family, detention or death. After the fall of Mosul, Christians who wanted to remain in the city were asked to pay the *jizya* or to leave. *Jizya* has been collected across ISIS-controlled areas in northern Iraq. In Sinjar, those who were not abducted or killed had the option to pay the *jizya* to stay.<sup>67</sup>

We learn a key fact—that payments to ISIS assure no protection—in that paragraph’s footnote 67: “These Sinjari were reportedly later killed by ISIS.”

This international echo chamber is establishing a conventional wisdom that Christians are respected by ISIS as “People of the Book” and given a *jizya* option to be protected. This theory is premised on the beliefs that ISIS is practicing traditional Islam and can be entrusted to uphold its “caliphate” obligations. Relying on unexamined claims by ISIS even while acknowledging that the group’s brutality against the Christians can be certain and severe, it then promotes the idea that ISIS does not intend to destroy the Christian community and thus ISIS treatment of Iraqi and Syrian Christians does not meet the requirements of the international Genocide Convention. The facts and statements of the Christians involved consistently demonstrate that these findings and the presumptions on which they are based are demonstrably false. ISIS not only intends to destroy the Christian communities under its control, it has effectively done so. ISIS should be held accountable for its ongoing genocide against the Christians, the Yazidis and others.

## *Conclusion*

In three widely publicized cases – Mosul, Raqqa and Qaryatayn – ISIS has demanded payments of Christians and has called it a “jizya” arrangement. As this examination shows, at no point is the taxed Christian allowed to worship in congregation or receive sacraments. Rather than guaranteeing the rights of practicing Christians, whether in Mosul, Raqqa, or Qaryatayn, or in the Khabour Valley, ISIS systematically shuts and destroys their churches and kidnaps their clergy. In every known case where ISIS has used the term “jizya,” if provided at all, the protection is short lived and followed by murder, enslavement, captivity, rape, torture, or complete dispossession—all evidence of genocide. Thus, ISIS has failed to fulfill its two basic obligations as ruler under traditional jizya agreements. The Christian payments to ISIS are evidence of extortion, ransom, or theft.

Far from respecting the Christians as “People of the Book,” the Islamic State has consistently demonstrated its intent is to kill, enslave, and otherwise eradicate this indigenous Middle Eastern Christian minority community and all evidence of its two-millennia-old civilization. In many cases, ISIS has not bothered to offer a jizya option before brutalizing and killing Christians. But even where ISIS claims to offer a jizya option, it demonstrates that it will not tolerate peaceful coexistence with Christians.

ISIS indicates that it believes that the very presence of practicing Christians, whom it routinely calls “unbelievers,” “infidels,” “polytheists,” and “Crusaders,” defiles its “caliphate.” In 2015, in the seventh issue of its English-language magazine *Dabiq*, ISIS declared that “the truth is also clear regarding . . . jihad against the Jews, the Christians” and others, and directed the reader to “go forth for jihad and defend your Islam wherever you may be.”

This genocide is ongoing. ISIS attacks against these Christians have not stopped, and many Christians remain in ISIS captivity or are unaccounted for. Only last month, Patriarch Apherem was [targeted](#) by a suicide bomber while presiding over a ceremony commemorating a massacre of Christians a century ago. The attack, from which the patriarch escaped unharmed but which killed three Christian security men, occurred in Qamishli, Syria, where ISIS has claimed responsibility for several prior bombings of Christian neighborhoods and restaurants.

Virtually every Christian who can escape ISIS territory does so. From the available information, it appears that those few who have remained behind in the ISIS caliphate, mainly the elderly or disabled, have been killed, enslaved, brutalized, forcibly converted, detained, held under house arrest, and/or robbed of all their wealth. Syriac Catholic Patriarch Younan, whose church was Nineveh’s largest, and Archbishop Nona, who headed the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese in Mosul, have both rightly described ISIS treatment of the Nineveh Christians as “genocide.”

There is no functioning church, no Christian clergy, no Christian liturgies or sacraments, no intact Christian community—in short, no Christian life evident anywhere under the Islamic State. In videos, ISIS boasts that its militants systematically desecrate and destroy Christian houses of worship, some of which—Qaryatayn’s Mar Elian monastery, the fourth-century Mar Behnam Monastery in Qaraqosh, and Mosul’s sixth-century monastery of Mar Elijah—existed throughout all the caliphates of past centuries.



The case of the historic Mar Behnam Monastery is particularly illustrative. The Syrian Catholic monks at the site were expelled by ISIS at gunpoint in July 2014, and the monastery was blown up in March 2015. The historic site existed under every type of Muslim ruler from the first arrival of Arab conquerors until 2015, and thus it existed under every caliph but one, al-Baghdadi, the pseudo-caliph. It is important to recall that under traditional rules of *jizya*, priests and monks and the indigent were exempted from paying the tax.

ISIS apparently invokes the *jizya* issue as religious propaganda to give its “caliphate” an aura of authenticity. In its elaborate recruitment videos, in glossy magazines, and in the blogosphere, the ISIS leadership attempts to portray itself as the standard bearer of authentic Islam. Alberto Fernandez, the State Department’s former counterterrorism coordinator, characterizes the ISIS *jizya* claims as a [“Salafi Caliphate publicity stunt”](#) undertaken to make the group’s leader look more caliph-like.

In sum, as the evidence – including the testimonial evidence of Christian survivors and their Christian leaders – unequivocally shows:

- ISIS has never offered a traditional *jizya* option to Christians anywhere.
- The claims by ISIS that it did so are not credible and are a propaganda ploy or a pretext meant to make its leader appear more caliph-like.
- ISIS does not respect Christians as “People of the Book” but treats them as intolerable “infidels.”
- Any payments demanded by ISIS as *jizya* from Christians are properly understood from their factual context as extortion or ransom payments or outright theft.
- ISIS cannot be trusted to honor any promises to Christians.
- In those cases where ISIS extorts payments from Christians and calls them *jizya*, the end result is always the same: the Christians are subjected to murder, rape, dispossession, kidnapping, and slavery, all of which are indicators of the crime of genocide.
- In ISIS-controlled territory, there remain no intact Christian communities, functioning churches, or religious leaders. Typically, every Christian who can escape does so. The few Christians who remain alive under ISIS have been forcibly converted, held captive, enslaved, put under house arrest, or used as human shields.
- ISIS has destroyed or closed all churches and monasteries in its territory.
- ISIS is committing genocide, for religious reasons, against the Iraqi and Syrian Christian community within its “caliphate” as surely as it is doing so against the Yazidi community and various other minority groups.
- The June 2016 report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Syria errs in its summary conclusion that ISIS respects Christians as “People of the Book” and gives them a *jizya* option. In its scant one paragraph mention of the Christians, the commission’s report repeats ISIS’ propaganda, and fails to include any critical analysis of it, or any citations, quotations or other supporting evidence regarding the Christian minority in ISIS-controlled territory.

The Christians and other religious minorities of Iraq and Syria who are facing genocide require substantial international help and oversight to rebuild their lives and communities in safety, with equal rights as citizens and religious freedom. Justice is needed for their sake and for that of the world community.

The United States government and Congress were right to recognize ISIS' treatment of Christians and others as genocide. They now need to undertake measures to both preserve these communities and the integrity of the decades-long international campaign against genocide.

Hudson Institute is a research organization promoting American leadership and global engagement for a secure, free, and prosperous future.

Founded in 1961 by strategist Herman Kahn, Hudson Institute challenges conventional thinking and helps manage strategic transitions to the future through interdisciplinary studies in defense, international relations, economics, health care, technology, culture, and law.

Hudson seeks to guide public policy makers and global leaders in government and business through a vigorous program of publications, conferences, policy briefings and recommendations.

**Hudson Institute**

1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Suite 400  
Washington, D.C. 20004

P: 202.974.2400  
info@hudson.org  
www.hudson.org