

Baquba city profile

19th October 2007

Facts and Figures

There have been so many kidnappings in Baquba that it is almost a relief to find bodies in the morgue, so they may receive a proper burial. Inter Press Service, 4th Sept '07



Location: 30 miles north of Baghdad, capital of Iraq's Diyala Governorate.

Population: 280,000-300,000

Ethnicity: Mostly Arabs, plus Kurds

Religion: Mainly Sunni Islam, plus Shi'a Islam

History

Settlements about six thousand years old have been uncovered in the area, along with pottery, tablets and statues going back this far. Baquba was a stop on the medieval Silk Road from Baghdad, and a centre for commerce and agriculture. The area is still famous for its palm, orange and citrus trees.

Violence

Each day I wake up I don't know who is in control of my city. One day it is the Americans, the next day a militia, the next day a resistance group. A religious sheikh in Baquba.



On June 19th, the US military launched a major 12 day offensive to rid Baquba and neighbouring villages of Al-Qaeda fighters. 23 fighters were killed but most of the reported 300-500 fighters fled ahead of the offensive, leading to a brief hiatus in the violence in the area.



On 23rd August, Al-Qaeda fighters killed an Imam and three others. The Imam had been helping to form an anti-al Qaeda tribal alliance. The fighters then kidnapped 15 women and children.

On 26th September 2007, 8 policemen including the Baquba police chief were killed by Sunni fighters during a 48 hour period involving at least 10 attacks targeting police, government and tribal leaders.

Reconciliation

Monday 24th September 2007 - The mixed village of Shifta, outside Baquba, was selected to be the place where Sunni and Shi'a leaders and militants would eat together in a Shi'a mosque to break the daily fast of Ramadan. Such a meeting to reconcile opposing groups was a major event in such a divided nation.

A young man ran to the Mosque. He was stopped by guards at the door. He blew himself up. 16 people died including senior police officers and militia leaders. Reconciliation is powerful and Al-Qaeda knows this. So they are doing all they can to stop it.



The Sunni militants known as The Brigades of 1920 Revolution have joined the US military in fighting rival Sunni militants loyal to Al-Qaeda. The group is named after an uprising against the British during their occupation of Iraq in those years.

Ghost town

CNN reported in February 2007 that Baquba had become a ghost town. A year earlier Baquba had been a vibrant city of 280,000-300,000 people enjoying the shops and markets. Now its population has fled the violence – criminal and inter-ethnic – or hides in their homes. No people means no business for the shop-keepers, and no one to clear up the piles of rubbish everywhere. Kidnapping seems to be the only thriving business, almost commonplace.



Within the “Sunni triangle” Baquba was known as a trouble spot, yet the local government and security forces still functioned. Now the tensions that were under the surface have exploded into major sectarian divisions, with Sunni and Shi’a having various fighting groups at war among and between each other. In this way the city reflects the nation and the ordinary people of the city suffer, as in the rest of Iraq.



Everyday life

The violence affects life at every level. In a city of 280,000 only 3 schools are reported to be open. Even if the schools were all open parents are too scared to let their children leave home for fear of harm or kidnapping. The children of Baquba are growing up without an education or the chance to play.

The problem of cholera mentioned previously in Kirkuk has reached Baquba with the first reported death on 23rd Sept '07. The extent of the destruction of the city’s infrastructure and poor sanitation lead to polluted water and the spread of cholera. Such reconstruction projects for the city’s water supply come down the list of priorities in the midst of war, kidnappings and food shortages, yet with poor water quality the spread of cholera can easily reach epidemic proportions.

How to pray

- Pray for an end to the violence in the city of Baquba and the province of Diyala
- Pray that the spirits of violence, division and destruction would be overthrown
- Pray for an end of kidnappings in Baquba
- Pray that the city leaders and elders would reconcile and unite for the sake of the people of the city
- Pray for the Lord’s heart of compassion for the people of Baquba
- Pray that all Arabs in Baquba, Sunni & Shi’a, would hear and experience the liberating love of Jesus and embrace Him as the Prince of Peace
- Pray that new communities of believers would be started in Baquba and surrounding villages



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