

Christians Rescued After Suffering Through ISIS Rule in Raqqa

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By Bridget Johnson

Christian fighters in the multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian Syrian Democratic Forces reported rescuing several Christians from Raqqa, the Syrian city that ISIS claimed as its capital three and a half years ago.

The SDF says 55 percent of the city is now under their control in the Wrath of Euphrates operation, a long drive to retake Raqqa that began in November.

The Syriac Military Council (MFS), which consists of Syriac Christian men and women fighting ISIS under the SDF umbrella, said last month that it was working to safely extract the remaining Christian families in Raqqa.

"There have been several Christian families, living and still living in the city of Raqqa, some of them managed to get out and got the support of the Syriac Military Council and other groups," MFS spokesman Kino Gabriel [said in mid-July](#), adding that there were "so many civilians" still trapped in Raqqa "that are still living there alongside the few Christian families," whose status was "currently unknown." He said the MFS was "taking different measures in order to locate those families and be able to rescue them as the operation and the offensive is continuing."

Today, the MFS released video of seven Syriac and Armenian Christians rescued from their long ordeal in the ISIS stronghold. One of the family members said they had to pay a jizya (tax) of 60,000 Syrian pounds (\$116.50) per year, per person to ISIS as non-Muslims -- this in an oppressive system in which residents who refused to fight for ISIS came in last in food and water distribution.

Raqqa had two churches in town before ISIS occupied the city. About 95 percent of the Christians were able to flee, 22-year-old fighter Matay Hanna [told Middle East Eye](#).

"The terrorists are our enemies. It's dangerous for Arabs, Kurds and Christians. Maybe the city is 98 per cent Arab, but we are fighting together, we are like brothers," Hanna said.

"Some say we are Christians and we must love everyone. But if we do that there will be no Christians left in the Middle East. We are Christians and should defend our people," he said of not letting ISIS win. "We don't need another genocide against us, it's enough. We used to be poor before, but now we are like a volcano. We had a genocide in Turkey against us in 1915, we must make this a red line for us. We must defend ourselves."

