

# Iraqi woman who met the pope sees little chance for change

Author:

Sat, 2021-03-13 02:06

BAGHDAD: The story of Doha Sabah Abdallah's personal tragedy and loss deeply resonated with Pope Francis during his historic visit last weekend to the northern Iraqi town of Qaraqosh, once devastated by Daesh.

Back in 2014, her son's death alerted the town's Christian community to the impending Daesh onslaught. A mortar shell fired by the militants as they approached Qaraqosh struck outside Abdallah's house, killing her son and two cousins playing in the front yard.

The pope heard Abdallah's testimony at a church ceremony in Qaraqosh last Sunday.

But just days after the pontiff's visit – meant to give hope to Iraq's dwindling Christian community and encourage its members to stay – Abdallah doubts the realities of life in Iraq will change.

She said she would also leave if given a chance.

"The pope doesn't have Moses' staff, he can't part the seas and solve our very difficult problems," she said.

"If I had the resources or if someone gave me the chance to leave this country, I would never come back."

Years after Iraqi forces declared victory over Daesh and drove terrorists from the area, Abdallah's disabled daughter still cannot attend proper schools, homes are still shattered and in ruins. Jobs are hard to come by, and none of Abdallah's relatives abroad plan to return.

Iraq's Christian population has dwindled from around 1.5 million before the 2003 US-led invasion to just a few hundred thousand today. Estimates put the current population between 250,000-500,000.

As churches and Christian communities were increasingly targeted by extremist groups at the height of Iraq's sectarian war that followed the invasion, the country saw an exodus of Christians. Even more fled after the brutal 2014 IS onslaught that emptied out entire Christian villages across the northern plains of Ninevah.

Francis's four-day visit to Iraq, including Qaraqosh, aimed to encourage Christians to stay, rebuild and restore what he called Iraq's "intricately designed carpet" of faiths and ethnic groups.

Qaraqosh, a majority Christian town in Ninevah, is just one of many that was attacked by Daesh seven years ago. The militants overran the town, damaged its church and scrawled the proclamation Daesh "will remain" on town walls. The few Christians who returned after the liberation of Qaraqosh in 2016 found bullet-riddled mannequins and other signs that the militants had used the church premises as a firing range for target practice.

Many homes were leveled in the battles to oust the group and basic services have yet to be restored. Most of the town's Christians remain scattered elsewhere in Iraq or abroad.

Abdallah remembers vividly that August 2014, when Daesh rampaged through Christian communities across Ninevah. She remembers her son and his two

cousins.

"Their souls saved the whole city," she recounted to the pontiff on Sunday. On the plane back to Rome, the pope singled her testimony and told reporters it had "touched me most."

"She said one word: forgiveness. I was moved," Francis said.

At every turn of his historic trip as he crisscrossed Iraq, Francis urged Iraqis to embrace diversity – from Najaf in the south, where he held a historic face-to-face meeting with powerful Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, to Nineveh to the north, where he met with Christian victims like Abdallah.

But after the pontiff's departure, Abdallah said, reality has set in.

"Our situation is difficult because there is no internal agreement within the government," she said. "How could anyone come back? There are no basic services."

Bahnam Yussef, another resident of Qaraqosh, echoed her concerns. "The pope's visit drew the world's attention to Iraq," he said, but Christians need more assurances before returning.

"They must get help, some of them have houses destroyed and burned, all this loss has to be compensated," he added.

Marking the pope's visit, Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi declared March 6 a national day for tolerance and co-existence.

But such gestures have not been accompanied by practical steps. So far, Iraq has not passed any legislation or enacted policies to entice Christians to return.

Abdallah said her wish is to live in an Iraq where Christians and other minorities are afforded equal rights – not today's Iraq where the sectarian power-sharing system often marginalizes minorities.

"It was incredible to see the pope, I never dreamed I would be so close to him" she said. "But it hasn't changed anything."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Pope Francis](#)

Turkey renews Egypt ties with eye on Arab reset  
Thousands protest in Algiers after election date announced

---

## [Turkey renews Egypt ties with eye on Arab reset](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-03-13 01:56

ANKARA: Turkey announced that it has resumed diplomatic contact with Egypt for the first time since breaking off relations in 2013.

However, experts caution that major long-term disputes between the two countries will need to be addressed before any further thaw in relations. "We have contacts with Egypt both at the intelligence level and at the Foreign Ministry level. Our contacts at the diplomatic level have started," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Friday in an interview with the state-run Anadolu Agency.

Cavusoglu said that neither side had put forward preconditions for the easing of relations.

The move is the result of months-long negotiations between the intelligence agencies of both countries.

"It is very likely that Egypt will demand that Turkey recalibrate its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in return for a normalization of relations," Selin Nasi, the London representative of the Ankara Policy Center, told Arab News.

Relations between Cairo and Ankara broke down in August 2013 after the removal of President Mohamed Morsi. Following those events, several members of the Muslim Brotherhood fled to Turkey.

Since then, Egypt and Turkey have often supported opposite sides in regional conflicts, especially during the Libyan war and the Eastern Mediterranean dispute.

Samuel Ramani, an academic and analyst at Oxford University, said it is "too early to tell" whether Cavusoglu's offer to Egypt will lead to renewed relations between the two countries.

**The Egypt-Greece eastern Mediterranean exclusive economic zone agreement makes Mediterranean security an unlikely theater of cooperation.**

**Samuel Ramani**, Analyst

"Turkey is likely trying to build on the improvement of relations between Qatar, its closest Arab partner, and Egypt," he told Arab News.

Ramani said the move is part of Turkey's broader policy of trying to ease tensions with Arab states.

"The focus of its security policy could be moving toward Iraq with an intervention in Sinjar in northern Iraq, so Ankara might be trying to limit its fronts of conflict," he said.

However, experts doubt whether Ankara will decrease its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which Cairo considers a terrorist organization.

Nasi said that, given the erosion of trust between the two countries, Cairo would like to see concrete steps from Ankara on the Muslim Brotherhood issue.

Ramani said: "I think Turkey will offer promises to Egypt informally on the Muslim Brotherhood issue, but will be cautious about public pronouncements that could create ideological splits within the ruling Justice and Development Party and Erdogan's electoral base."

Turkey's military presence in Libya is also another issue that will come into play.

Ramani said that the Libya situation could result in Turkey-Egypt cooperation on a diplomatic process.

"The Egypt-Greece eastern Mediterranean exclusive economic zone agreement makes Mediterranean security an unlikely theater of cooperation. Both disagree on Syria and have different approaches to Gulf security and Israel-Palestine, too," he said.

"The utility of expanded economic cooperation could encourage a de-escalation on both sides, but that is as far as it goes," Ramani added.

Egypt still rejects the controversial maritime deal between Turkey and Libya's Government of National Accord. It also signed an alternative maritime deal with Greece last year to demarcate maritime boundaries.

"Turkey reportedly wants to sign maritime delineation agreements with Israel and Egypt that are similar to the one it signed with Libya," Nasi said.

"Egypt's maritime zone deal with Greece appears to recognize minor Turkish claims. This was interpreted in the Turkish press as an admission of Turkish sovereignty claims in the Aegean and Mediterranean."

However, the deal also recognizes Rhodes and Crete as part of the Greek continental shelf, undermining the Turkish-Libyan maritime deal.

"That's why it's difficult to say Turkey and Egypt are on the same side. For them to be on the same side, one of those maritime deals needs to be nullified," Nasi said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Turkey](#)

Turkey logs highest daily rise in COVID-19 cases this year  
EU halts sanctions against family of Egypt's Mubarak

---

## [Thousands protest in Algiers after election date announced](#)

Author:

Sat, 2021-03-13 01:42

ALGIERS: Thousands demonstrated in Algiers on Friday, rejecting early legislative elections announced the day before, as weekly rallies by the resurgent Hirak pro-democracy movement gain momentum. Protesters defied a coronavirus-related ban on gatherings to rally from different parts of the capital, converging on the central post office, the Hirak movement's emblematic rallying point, AFP correspondents said. Demonstrators shouted slogans including "No elections with mafia gangs" and "a civil not a military state," a key Hirak slogan. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on Thursday issued a decree setting June 12 for early legislative elections, after dissolving parliament last month. "To safeguard itself, the system says: Legislative (elections)," one poster

read Friday.

The Hirak movement broke out in February 2019 in outrage at then-President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term in office.

The ailing strongman was forced to step down weeks later, but the movement continued with demonstrations, demanding a sweeping overhaul of a ruling system in place since Algeria's independence from France in 1962.

Since its second anniversary on Feb. 22, the Hirak has restarted weekly Friday protests, suspended for almost a year due to the pandemic.

## **FASTFACT**

**President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has pledged that the June elections will be free of corruption and will 'open the doors of parliament to young people.'**

"The same system is still in place. We will not vote on June 12," a 50-year-old shopkeeper told AFP from the protest.

People also took to the streets in other parts of the country, including northwestern Oran, central Tizi Ouzou and eastern Annaba.

The CNLD prisoners' rights group said protesters had been arrested in Tizi Ouzou, without providing further details.

Once a premier under Bouteflika and elected in a widely boycotted presidential poll in December 2019, Tebboune has reached out to the protest movement while also seeking to neutralize it.

In a gesture of appeasement, last month he announced pardons for dozens of jailed pro-democracy activists, including several prominent figures.

Tebboune has pledged that the June elections will be free of corruption and will "open the doors of parliament to young people."

A constitutional referendum in November saw record-low participation.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Algiers](#)

Thousands march through Algiers on anniversary of Hirak protests  
French mountaineer's killing: Algiers trial opens

---

## [Syrian child refugees in Turkey: A decade in limbo](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-03-12 00:30

ANKARA: Four-year-old Fatma is the Turkey-born child of Syrian refugees from Damascus, who fled the civil war to start a new life in Istanbul.

Fatma speaks fluent Turkish and is encouraged by her parents to memorize some Arabic words too, to maintain her bond with Syria. They have used much of their money to ensure she can attend a decent kindergarten, but say they have heard stories from other Syrians whose children no longer wish to attend school because of the xenophobia they have faced.

As the 10th anniversary of the Syrian civil war approaches, many refugee children who fled to neighboring Turkey still face hardship. Greater efforts need to be made to ensure they do not become another lost generation.

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, around 6.6 million people have been forced to flee the country and another 6.1 million are internally displaced.

On March 18, 2016, the EU and Turkey agreed on a controversial refugee deal to restrict the influx of refugees into Europe in return for an aid package worth \$6.7 billion and various other political benefits for Ankara. That deal is expected to be renewed soon but the parties face challenges in finding consensus over the updated terms.

Turkey currently hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, 46 percent of whom are children. Nearly 1.2 million of them are of school age, while around 500,000 are aged five or below.

Those who are enrolled in Turkish schools are – for the most part – making their best efforts to assimilate into society, but many still face discrimination from their peers and from other students' families. That is likely one of the reasons why around 35 percent of Syrian children in Turkey do not attend school.

In 2019, 720,000 Syrian children were working in dangerous sectors such as construction, furniture and textile, according to official figures. Several of them died in fires at factories, and many were suffering from health conditions related to their work.

“Especially (once they're over) the age of 12, Syrian refugee families in Turkey prefer that their children work and contribute to the (family's income),” Murat Erdogan, a professor at the Turkish-German University in Istanbul, told Arab News.

According to a report released on Tuesday by Save the Children – which surveyed Syrian refugee children in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and the Netherlands – school enrolment at primary level has decreased by around 10 percent since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Roughly 64 percent of Syrian families living in urban households in Turkey live close to or below the poverty line, but only three percent of the children surveyed in Turkey said they would want to return to Syria, the same report noted.

Prof. Erdogan says that the pandemic hit Syrian refugee children in Turkey hard, since they not only lost their human interaction with their teachers, but many do not have the necessary equipment to access remote learning.

“Each refugee student costs the Turkish education system about \$1,000. Around 1,500 new schools need to be constructed and 60,000 new teachers employed to (cover) all the Syrian refugee children in Turkey. First of all, Turkey should overcome its capacity problem. Otherwise, a lost generation is very likely,” he said.

Syrians in Turkey who have not been granted citizenship are classified as having “temporary protection” status. This ambiguous label often prevents them from joining the labor force or accessing other support systems, and



many live in constant fear of forced deportation or arrest if Ankara becomes involved in a dispute with the Syrian regime or the European Union.

In 2019, Turkish police conducted several operations targeting undocumented migrants and refugees in Istanbul and transferred those without the necessary papers to temporary refugee camps or to the cities in which they were originally registered.

According to Omar Kadkoy, a migration policy analyst at Ankara-based think tank TEPAV, there are several interconnected hurdles to overcome in order to ensure that Syrian children are no longer forced to work and can continue their education.

“The first is the informal nature of Syrian employment in Turkey’s labor market: while 800,000 to a million Syrians are estimated to work, only around 64,000 of them have work permits. Working informally is associated with exploitation, which hampers (the workers’ chances of) financial security,” he told Arab News. The answer, he suggested, is to change Turkey’s work-permit regulations so that greater responsibility and culpability falls on employers.

Furthermore, Kadkoy noted, many Syrian refugee parents struggle to ensure their children’s attendance at school, and children will often be put to work so their families can make ends meet.

“The second issue is the inadequacy of the Conditional Cash Transfers for Education (CCTE) program,” he said. CCTE is the largest EU-funded humanitarian education program and provides financial support to Syrian families whose children attend school on a regular basis. Kadkoy said that further funding needs to be found if the threat of a lost generation is to be contained.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Turkey](#)

[Syria](#)

[refugees](#)

[Syrian refugees](#)

400,000 Syrian child refugees in Turkey not in school: UNFather of drowned Syrian refugee boy Alan Kurdi meets pope in IraqDenmark criticized for telling Syrian refugees to return homeReport reveals scale of mental health crisis among Syrian refugees

---

## [Man pleads guilty to killing ex-lover in Dubai](#)

Thu, 2021-03-11 23:47

DUBAI: A jealous ex-boyfriend, who admitted to slitting his former lover's throat at her doorstep, pleaded guilty to premeditated murder before the Dubai Criminal Court on Thursday.

The Jordanian man, 36, surrendered to police shortly after killing his former lover in July 2020, according to court papers obtained by Arab News.

Dubai prosecutors described the crime as a “monstrous murder.”

The defendant met the Ukrainian woman in an Abu Dhabi restaurant in 2017 and they started a romantic relationship that lasted for two years. Several violent confrontations followed the breakup that resulted in stalking accusations and a restraining order against the suspect.

On the day of the killing, the defendant hid behind an emergency exit door at the victim’s residence before dragging her out of her flat. During their scuffle, the suspect said he stabbed the victim’s neck twice before slashing her throat.

The victim was on the phone with her sister shortly before the murder took place as a neighbor discovered the dead body and alerted the building’s security staff.

A court-appointed lawyer is expected to represent the suspect before judges on March 22.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Dubai Criminal Court](#)

[Dubai](#)

[Abu Dhabi](#)

Dubai court reduces sentence for editor who killed his wife  
Dubai court increases British newspaper editor's sentence to 15 years for killing wife