

## **Mosul Exodus: Three Faith Groups, One Story**

**Author:** [an IWPR contributor in Nineveh](#)

[Laith Hammoudi](#)

"They left everything behind and ran for their lives."

"We used to care about one another. My neighbours were Shia, Sunni and Christian," Raad Mahmud says as he recalled the life he led until recently in the Iraqi city of Mosul.

On June 10, the armed forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) completed a three-day offensive to capture this major urban centre, and Mahmud, a father of seven, knew it was time to leave. He feared his family would be at great risk purely because they are Shia Muslims.

As news of Mosul's capture came in, he put his family in their old Opel, and drove out of the city. They left at midnight and kept going till two in the afternoon, when they judged they were well out of ISIS's reach in the Nineveh Plains east of Mosul.

On June 11, the International Organisation for Migration said its teams on the ground estimated that 500,000 people had fled their homes in Mosul.

Mahmud is grateful for the kindness shown by the people in the Nineveh Plains, an area that has traditionally been home to many of Iraq's Christians.

"They showed great sympathy and gave us basic essentials like beds and blankets," he told IWPR.

Mahmud is pessimistic about the future, and doubts he will be able to return home any time soon.

"It's very dangerous now in Mosul and I expect that this will last for months before I can return home," he said.

Adil Ravoka, a civil activist in Nineveh governorate, is among those taking part in the effort to provide humanitarian support to the many families displaced by the capture of Mosul.

"Many NGOs distribute aid to displaced families, but it isn't enough because they need things like cooking stoves and cold water, as they left everything behind and ran for their lives," Ravoka said.

In Tal Asqaf, a Christian-majority city north of Mosul, Abu Bahnam walks the streets asking people where he can find a bakery to buy bread for his family of six. He too is a refugee.

"The departure of my neighbours and my son's fears were the main reasons that pushed me into leaving my house in western Mosul," he said. "I never imagined I'd leave my house, my friends and my work, but my young son was very much afraid and asked me to leave as most of our neighbours had done."

The first warning signs came when Abu Bahnam gave refuge to a family from a part of the city where the insurgents were already advancing. After that, he started watching the street as one neighbour after another took off, carrying only the basic essentials with them.

When ISIS drew close to his part of the city, Abu Bahnam knew it was time to go.

"It was the most difficult of decisions to abandon my grocer's shop and make my daughters leave their jobs, but I took it because I feared the unknown," he said.

Since reaching Tal Asqaf, the family has rented an old house after staying with friends for a while. As Christians, they are in familiar surroundings, but Abu Bahnam thinks only of getting back to his own home at some point.

Another Mosul refugee, Faris, fled with his family because they saw ISIS as a threat, although they are Sunni Muslims like the insurgents. Like many others in the city, they watched with dismay as the Iraqi army simply melted away.

"We were surprised by the disappearance of the security forces, and by the insurgents' entering Mosul and taking control within a few hours," he told IWPR.

In the chaos, Faris and the brother he shared a house with ended up going in different directions.

"The circumstances forced us to separate. He went to Erbil while I came to the Nineveh Plains," he said.

Faris can now do little more than watch the news on TV, which only makes him more depressed.

**Reporting by an IWPR-trained journalist in Nineveh governorate, whose name is withheld for security reasons. Laith Hammoudi is IWPR's editor in Iraq.**

**Location:** [Iraq](#)

**Topic:** [Conflict](#)

**Focus:** [Iraq](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/mosul-exodus-three-faith-groups-one-story>