

LATEST NEWS # 434, August 17, 2007

The following news concerns Iraq.

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http://biblesociety.org/latestnews/index_latestnews.html

Bible Society to open office in Iraq

LEBANON — The Bible Society has received official permission to open a local office in the region of Kurdistan, northern Iraq, and is planning to fund a Kurdish office in the city of Erbil from next year.

News that the permission had been granted reached Nabil Omeish, the Program Coordinator for the Bible Society's work in Iraq, in a phone call last month while he was on holiday in France.

Cutting his holiday short and leaving his family in Europe, Mr Omeish flew to Jordan and on to Erbil, one of the leading cities in the Kurdish Autonomous Region.

On arrival, he met the government official who had contacted him, and after completing all the formalities, he was handed a 'Faraman' – or government decree – in the Kurdish Surani language, giving the Bible Society official permission to open an office and conduct all its functions and activities in the self-governing region.



Although the timing of the news may have taken Mr Omeish by surprise, it was in fact the result of months of hard work and visits by him to various government offices and officials. In addition, the printing and distribution for the first time, last December, of 20,000 Kurdish Scripture Calendars (see *Latest News* # 384) speeded up the process: the sight of the Scripture Calendars on many desks in government and public offices is an indicator of the strong impact that the Bible Society work has had in the region.

Mike Bassous, General Secretary of the Bible Society in Lebanon, also responsible for the work in Iraq, emphasised the importance of moving in response to the decree.

“It is very important that we translate this official approval into action,” he said, “by opening a branch in the Kurdish region to strengthen our work amongst the Kurdish Church.”

In fact, in anticipation of the decree, the Bible Society in Lebanon had already set up an unfunded project to establish an office in Erbil. In 2008, it is planning to staff a Kurdish person to coordinate its work in the region.

Kurdistan itself is an autonomous region inside Iraq's borders. Administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government, it has its own governing bodies and functionaries, such as a parliament, prime minister and cabinet ministers. The region has become a safe haven for the displaced Iraqi Christians seeking security inside Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Bible Society continues to operate from its office and warehouse in Baghdad. A new branch in the relatively secure northern region will strengthen its mission and be very effective for the Bible cause.

Photo (Bible Society and World Compassion):

IRQ05DJ-8 Nabil Omeish (right) the Iraq Program Coordinator, shown, in a photo taken in 2005, with Saba Hana (left) and Waseem Adel (centre), local staff working with the Bible Society team in Iraq.

Useful web sites:

<http://www.theotheriraq.com/images/FactSheet.pdf>

<http://africa.reuters.com/world/news/usnN02399557.html>

<http://www.krg.org/>

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This report refers to project 79215.

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