



Vox Populi - Voice of the People

16 November 2022

Next Wednesday, 23 November 2022, we will be reminded of the 200 million Christians around the world who cannot freely exercise their faith. They suffer persecution and oppression for their love of Christ.

You will see images of cathedrals, churches and public buildings from many countries illuminate their facades in red, the colour of blood and martyrdom. This is an initiative of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) which the Diocese of Broken Bay is also supporting in solidarity of the persecuted.

Founded as a Catholic aid organisation in 1947 for war refugees, ACN is the only international Catholic charity dedicated to the pastoral and spiritual support of suffering and persecuted Christians.

ACN launched their first RED Wednesday in 2016. It has now become a global tradition but sadly the number of people persecuted for their beliefs has increased.

Speaking in Sydney this week to raise awareness of the work of ACN, the Director of International Projects, Regina Lynch, who has been working with the organisation for more than 40 years, said she has seen the persecutioun of Christians shift from state actors to radicalised religious groups.

“I see a big difference from when I first joined, when the persecution was done in the name of countries,” she said.

“You still have traces of that in places like China and Cuba, but now, it’s really a radicalism of Islam and nationalistic governments who are pushing towards totalitarianism. There are definitely greater attacks on religious freedom than there were 20 years ago, partly because of globalisation and the internet.

“We’re doing more emergency projects with internally displaced people, rebuilding churches, helping construct a centre for training widows of men killed in violence, and helping with trauma healing, including with young woman who were kidnapped by Boko Haram,” she said.

The war in Ukraine has become a key concern for the organisation, which is providing key aid following Russian's invasion earlier this year.

"We're very close to the two Churches in the Ukraine, being the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Latin Church," said Ms Lynch.

"ACN has been working in the country for decades since the fall of communism, assisting in the formation of thousands of priests in Ukraine.

"We've really tried to help them to emerge from the ashes of communism and accompany them. We'd got to the stage, after rebuilding seminaries and renovating Churches, it was looking good.

"Today, we have the sad story of the war, and we have a lot of initiatives helping people, particularly in the east of Ukraine."

ACN also maintains a strong presence in the Middle East, where countless Christians have been persecuted, particularly in areas such as Iraq and Syria. Economic crisis in Lebanon also threatens to expel a large proportion of the Maronite population there too.

The Diocese of Broken Bay will show our support, remember and pray for the persecuted next Wednesday when the façade of Our Lady of Dolours at Chatswood will be floodlit in red, and Bishop Anthony Randazzo will celebrate Mass at 7.30pm to which everyone is welcome.

The Church will also acknowledge the suffering of those in Ukraine with the country's national colours of blue and yellow floodlighting the Church on the other days of the week.

To read the full interview with Ms Regina Lynch and more about RED Wednesday visit <https://www.bbcatholic.org.au/latest-news/red-wednesday-2022>