

**When love and courage meet, the Lord makes miracles**  
**+ Mgr Yousif Thomas** Chaldean archbishop of Kirkuk and Suleimaniya

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On the night of Thursday to Friday October 20th to 21st many jihadists from the ISIS tried to enter the official buildings of the town hall and police stations as well as security centers in Kirkuk. These forces concentrated around the houses of Kirkuk city seeing the resistance they faced. Then to escape the shootings of the security forces they head the surrounding houses choosing the Dominican sisters' convent and the houses rented by the Chaldean bishop to host immigrant students following the invasion of ISIS. These students are of all faiths: Christians, Muslims, Yazidis, Mandeans, in all, more than 500 students at present. 71 students were there on that night. They were about to start their academic year and were under the responsibility of Mr. Imad Matti (Abu Durayd) when ISIS burst into these places. Mr Imad tells us in details what happened: The young girls realized the jihadists were invading them at three o'clock in the morning on Friday. These terrorists had climbed the walls of the houses and reached the garden shouting "Allah Akbar". The students took photos of them and noticed that they were not only armed but also equipped with explosive belts around their waists. The security forces were aware of the seriousness of the situation and these girls had to remain 24 hours without electricity trembling, in total fear. At that moment, heavy fighting and shootings took place without being able to make the terrorists surrender. So a plan was adopted to make everything possible to save the 14 students lodging in the first house. The security forces succeeded in saving them despite their continuous firing during the whole operation.

At 2 a.m., we proceeded the next operation to rescue the 7 students in the second house. It was the riskiest one as 4 terrorists were inside the house eating and drinking while the students were hidden under their beds. These terrorists were blinded by the Lord because at no time did they find them. I therefore took the risk to ask them to come out of their hiding place to run towards the wall at the back of the house and this in a minute of time.

9 members of the emergency forces demonstrated exceptional courage and bravery as they were more than ready to give their lives to save these girls. It was dark and despite intense firing the 7 students were rescued. As for the third group of students the rescue operation took place at 5 a.m. on Saturday thanks to the "Suat" forces from Suleimaniyah whose missions to fight terrorism. There were 30 students in that house.

I must admit that I admired their courage and determination as the girls remained calm and followed very precisely all the orders and instructions that were given to them during these operations.

The mobile phone played a huge role in the success of this intervention after which the four jihadists terrorists blew themselves up in the students 'house.

The seven students had remained under their beds 18 hours without moving and without letting their presence being detected. They were transferred to Erbil where they are recovering and reassuring their families.

We do hope they will continue their studies with even more motivation than ever, with the help of the Chaldean diocese who has committed to finance their studies despite all the difficulties and challenges we are facing. We thank God for this grace and miracles. We also pray for all the martyrs, the wounded and victims as well as for all those who suffered damage and losses.