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Some 30,000 Christians are thought to have fled Mosul since the city was seized by the Islamic State militant group. It has told them to convert to Islam, pay a tax or face death.

The Right Reverend David Walker told the BBC that UK involvement in the Iraq war meant it had a moral obligation.

The Home Office says each asylum claim is decided on its "individual merits". What's happening now in Iraq is the direct consequence of what happened in 2003”

The Bishop of Manchester

"The UK has a proud record of offering sanctuary to those who need it," a spokesman said.

On Monday, France said it was ready to offer asylum to Iraqi Christians.

Islamic State (IS) was previously known as Isis (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant).

A senior Christian cleric in Iraq, Patriarch Louis Sako, has estimated the northern city of Mosul had a Christian community of 35,000 before the advance of IS.

According to the UN, 20 families from the ancient Christian minority now remain in the city, which IS has taken as the capital of its Islamic state.

'Our mess'

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Bishop Walker has been joined in his call to offer asylum by the Bishop of Leeds, the Right Reverend Nick Baines, and the Bishop of Worcester, the Right Reverend Dr John Inge.

Bishop Walker told BBC Radio 4's Sunday programme: "What's happening now in Iraq is the direct consequence of what happened in 2003 - the intervention that we and the US and others had then.

"And this is, in part, our mess.

"We've created the space in which Isis have moved in and have expelled Christians from northern Iraq and would like to expel them from the whole of that country."

He said Christians in northern Iraq had not been "given a realistic choice".

"They can stay and be killed, they can pay an impossible tax in gold - regularly - to be allowed, apparently, to stay or they have to leave."

He said it was unlikely large numbers of Iraqi Christians would come to the UK, adding: "But, whatever they are, it's the moral obligation - it's not the size of the numbers that matter."

He added that, "as part of the legacy" of the UK's part in the Iraq War, "we have a duty to look after those who are displaced by it in the way that these are being displaced - faced with death or flight".

Announcing its offer of help this week, France's foreign and interior ministers said in a joint statement: "We are ready, if they so desire, to help facilitate asylum on our territory."

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