

THE IRISH AT WAR

Dubliner battles to ease life in brutal war zone

By Fiona Dillon

A CLONDALKIN man is living so close to the Iraqi fighting that he can see smoke plumes from explosions in the war-torn country.

Horrifying pictures have emerged from Iraq, where the ruthless and brutal jihadi army called ISIS has seized the Iraqi towns of Mosul, Tikrit, Fallujah, Tal Afar and Rawa. It has been using the internet to publicise its atrocities, posting grisly photos of beheadings and other violence.

William Holden (44) is currently in Erbil in Kurdistan where he is involved in directing the distribution of aid to half-a-million refugees.

But he was in Baghdad until Friday, June 6, when reports reached them of major events happening near Mosul. "I could see the smoke plumes from a couple of explosions," William said. He and his colleagues moved to Erbil three days later.

ATTACK

William, a dad of two, has been working as the head of logistics and procurement with the Danish Refugee Council in Iraq for nearly four months.

"The situation is fluid to say the least, so we are preparing for all eventualities," he told the *Herald*.

"There are contingencies in place to exit Erbil if there is any sign of an attack on Kurdistan proper. Right now, we work every day, all day, even



CONFLICT: A girl who fled from the violence in Mosul at a camp near Erbil. Above, militants from ISIS with captured Iraqi soldiers in Tikrit. Far left, Dubliner William Holden

are allowed to board the plane from Erbil you have to have the correct documentation or you will not get past the border control in Baghdad International Airport."

The cars collecting him and a colleague travelled in a pair in case one broke down. "The tension in the air was palpable," said William, who works with the Irish Emergency Logistics Team based in Dublin.

Mosul is about 40km from the Kurdish border. Once the group, known as ISIS or the "Daash" came to town, anyone who was not Sunni had to plan to leave - and quickly, he said.

hnews@herald.ie

Imam urges Irish Muslims not to join in fighting with forces in the Middle East

By Luke Byrne

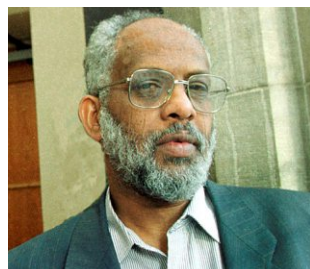
A PROMINENT imam has urged Irish Muslims not to travel to Syria or Iraq to fight in the civil wars raging in those countries.

It comes as it emerged that gardai are monitoring those fighters who have returned to Ireland from the war zones.

Although it is unclear exactly how many Irish citizens have travelled to fight, one estimate puts the figure at around 30.

There have also been four people with Irish links killed during the fighting in Syria.

Europeans have also gone to fight with the Sunni Muslim extremists, the Islamic State



in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), who are attempting to overrun Iraq. The group believes that the Shiites are apostates and must die in order to forge a pure form of Islam.

Yahya Al-Hussein, an imam at the Sunni mosque on Dublin's South Circular Road, has urged

Irish Muslims not to travel to Syria or Iraq to fight.

"We don't advise anybody to go. If they come and talk to us, this is what we say," he told the *Herald*.

"Most of the time we don't know who has gone. We don't know how many have gone, we would never advise anyone to go.

The Oireachtas Justice Committee has been told of concerns that some fighters could have become so radicalised while in the war zones that they could present a security threat when they come home.

Fine Gael TD David Stanton, the chairman of that committee, was informed about the fighters



VICTIMS: A man helps an injured boy following a government air strike in Aleppo, Syria. Hudhaifa El Sayed (top right) and Shamseddin Gaidan (right), who were killed in Syria. Left, Dublin imam Yahya Al-Hussein

in a briefing by Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald.

The first fighter with Irish links to die in Syria was Egyptian-born Hudhaifa El Sayed (22), from Drogheda, who was shot by regime forces in northern Syria in December 2012.

In February last year Libyan-born Shamseddin Gaidan (16) from Navan was killed after he went to Syria without his parents' permission.

In late April that year, Jor-

danian-born Alaa Ciymeh (26), who grew up in Dublin, was also killed.

He had travelled to Syria as part of Liwa al-Umma, a rebel brigade founded by a Libyan-Irish man named Mehdi al-Harati, who also commanded a unit during the Libyan revolution.

In June last year, Hisham Habbash (29) died after joining rebel forces battling president Bashar al-Assad.

The Habbash family, who are Palestinian, moved from Libya to Ireland when Hisham was very young. He took Irish citizenship and graduated with an engineering degree from UCD.

This month, the European Commission discussed further cooperation between member states on anti-terrorist intelligence, especially on fighters returning from war-zones.

lbyrne@herald.ie