



Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

TO: All Bishops

FROM: Most Rev. Richard E. Pates, Bishop of Des Moines 
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

DATE: August 6, 2014

RE: Prayer for Peace in Iraq

Many of you have heard the repeated calls of our Holy Father to pray for peace in Iraq. Violence there has escalated as the Islamic State (ISIS) has taken control of large sections of Iraq, destroying, burning and looting churches, homes and businesses. Thousands of Christians and others who choose not to convert to ISIS' extremist brand of Islam have fled for their lives.

I have written to the National Security Advisor Susan Rice asking that the U.S. do all it can to provide humanitarian assistance, through trusted NGOs like Catholic Relief Services, to help these beleaguered people who are desperate for water, food, shelter.

His Beatitude Louis Rafael Sako, Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Iraq, had joined with the international pontifical foundation, Aid to the Church in Need, to call for a Global Day of Prayer for Peace to be held on August 6, 2014, the Feast of the Transfiguration.

The Patriarch noted that the feast of Transfiguration marks the moment when Jesus, on Mount Tabor, appears to three disciples in a state of glory, shortly before His crucifixion. To Patriarch Sako, whom I had the honor to meet at his installation in March 2013, this feast signifies hope for humanity: a source of courage when obstacles appear impossible to surmount; a sign that light is stronger than darkness; and testimony that death can turn into life. In the midst of so much suffering in Iraq, especially for the ancient Christian community of Mosul, the Patriarch said that participation in this Global Day of Prayer would be a witness that Christians have not forgotten or abandoned their suffering brothers and sisters in Iraq.

Since there was almost no advance notice to disseminate this prayer to parishes within your dioceses by August 6, I ask you to invite the people of your diocese to pray this special prayer written by Patriarch Sako at Masses on Sunday, August 17 and to keep the intentions for peace in the Middle East, but especially Iraq, in the Prayers of the Faithful. Please encourage your people to let their elected representatives know of their concern for Christians and other religious minorities who are in dire straits in Iraq, Syria, Egypt and other countries.

*Lord,
The plight of our country
is deep and the suffering of Christians
is severe and frightening.
Therefore, we ask you Lord
to spare our lives, and to grant us patience,*

*and courage to continue our witness of Christian values
with trust and hope.*

Lord, peace is the foundation of life;

*Grant us the peace and stability that will enable us
to live with each other without fear and anxiety,
and with dignity and joy.*

Glory be to you forever.

† Louis Raphael I Sako

Patriarch Sako went on to pray: “Let us unite our voices and hearts before the Lord of peace. May the light of Tabor fill the hearts of all suffering people with consolation and hope. May the message of Tabor, through our prayers, inspire the leaders of Iraq to sacrifice personal interests for the common good and welfare.”

The Holy Father has said “violence generates more violence; dialogue is the only path to peace.” Let us continue to pray in communion with the Holy Father and with Patriarch Sako for a cessation of the violence and for a peace that will allow people to live in harmony without fear.

Statement of the Director of the Press Office on behalf of the Holy Father

(7 August 2014)

The Holy Father is following with deep concern the dramatic news reports coming from northern Iraq, which involve defenseless populations. Christian communities are particularly affected: a people fleeing from their villages because of the violence that rages in these days, wreaking havoc on the entire region.

At the Angelus prayer on July 20th, Pope Francis cried with pain: "*[O]ur brothers and sisters are persecuted, they are pushed out, forced to leave their homes without the opportunity to take anything with them. To these families and to these people I would like to express my closeness and my steadfast prayer. Dearest brothers and sisters so persecuted, I know how much you suffer, I know that you are deprived of everything. I am with you in your faith in Him who conquered evil!*"

In light of these terrible developments, the Holy Father renews his spiritual closeness to all those who are suffering through this painful trial, and makes the impassioned appeals of the local bishops his own, asking together with them in behalf of their sorely tried communities, that the whole Church and all the faithful raise up with one voice a ceaseless prayer, imploring the Holy Spirit to send the gift of peace.

His Holiness urgently calls on the international community to protect all those affected or threatened by the violence, and to guarantee all necessary assistance – especially the most urgently needed aid – to the great multitude of people who have been driven from their homes, whose fate depends entirely on the solidarity of others.

The Pope also appeals to the conscience of all people, and to each and every believer he repeats: "*May the God of peace create in all an authentic desire for dialogue and reconciliation. Violence is not conquered with violence. Violence is conquered with peace! Let us pray in silence, asking for peace; everyone, in silence.... Mary Queen of peace, pray for us!*" (Angelus, July 20, 2014).