



## United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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### **Solidarity at the Service of All People in the Middle East February 10, 2017**

*A statement from Archbishop William E. Lori of  
Baltimore, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for  
Religious Liberty; Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces,  
New Mexico, chairman of the Committee on  
International Justice and Peace;*

*Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, Texas, chairman of the  
Committee on Migration; and Bishop Gregory J.  
Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn,  
chairman of the board of Catholic Relief Services*

Our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East need our solidarity, and the Middle East needs our Christian brothers and sisters. A concern for our Christian brethren is inclusive and does not exclude a concern for all the peoples of the region who suffer violence and persecution, both minorities and majorities, both Muslims and Christians.

A recent USCCB delegation visit to Iraq confirmed once again that what has happened—and continues to happen—to Christians, Yezidis, Shia Muslims, and other minorities in Syria and Iraq, at the hands of the so-called "Islamic State," is genocide. It is important for Syrians and Iraqis of all faiths to recognize this as genocide, for that recognition is a way to help everyone come to grips with what is happening, and to form future generations that will reject any ideology that leads to genocidal acts and other atrocities. Likewise, a particular focus on minorities is essential to forming communities that respect the rights of all, including members of the majority.

What can our nation do? The United States can:

- Accept our nation's fair share of the most vulnerable families of all religions and ethnicities for resettlement as refugees, including special consideration of the victims of genocide and other atrocities;
- Encourage both the central government in Baghdad and the regional government in Erbil to strengthen the rule of law based on equal citizenship and ensure the protection of all, including vulnerable minorities; U.S. assistance should help local and national efforts to improve policing and the judiciary, while encouraging appropriate self-governance at the local level; similar actions will also be needed in Syria; and
- Provide generous U.S. humanitarian and development assistance to refugees, displaced persons and communities in Iraq and Syria as they rebuild, including funding for trusted faith-based non-governmental agencies like Catholic Relief Services and local Caritas agencies so that aid reaches all groups, including majority and minority communities.

To focus attention on the plight of Christians and other minorities is not to ignore the suffering of others. Rather, by focusing on the most vulnerable members of society, we strengthen the entire fabric of society to protect the rights of all.