



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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October 15, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We welcomed President Obama's announcement of the end to the combat phase of U.S. operations in Iraq, and his commitment to partner with and support Iraq as they "build a democracy within their borders."

As you know, the Holy See and our bishops' Conference raised grave moral questions prior to the military intervention in Iraq, and then called for our nation's military forces to be withdrawn at the earliest opportunity consistent with the goal of a "responsible transition." We therefore welcome the end of U.S. led combat. However, our nation continues to have moral responsibilities toward the Iraqi people, particularly addressing: the ongoing violence; the forming of an inclusive, representative and accountable government; the protection of religious freedom; and the resettling of Iraqi refugees and those internally displaced.

Our nation's commitment to support Iraq takes on special urgency in light of concerns expressed by Iraqi bishops. Chaldean Bishop Shlemon Warduni stated, "There are no jobs, there are car bombs, kamikaze attacks and other acts of violence. If foreign troops leave, they have a duty to leave peace and security behind them." Latin Rite Archbishop Jean Sleiman of Baghdad said, "The nation still finds it very hard to have a rule of law, to guarantee security, to rebuild infrastructure, to reduce poverty, to stop emigration and to kick-start the economy." The withdrawal of U.S. combat forces means the U.S. needs to help enable the Iraqi government to promote security within Iraq, especially for vulnerable minority communities like Christians.

We also have a moral obligation to assist the 2.5 million Iraqi refugees and 2 million internally displaced persons, a disproportionate number of whom are Christian. Of those who fled to surrounding countries, some found temporary refuge with family, but many had to rely on meager resources provided by overburdened host governments or on their own limited funds. When money ran out, their legal status made it difficult for Iraqi refugees to find jobs and to have access to health care, education and social services. Those displaced within Iraq are often under attack and hard pressed to support their families. Both refugees and internally displaced persons are extremely vulnerable to human trafficking.

Specifically, the United States must provide more resources and resettlement options to Iraqi refugees in surrounding countries. While the United States has allocated 17,000 resettlement slots for Iraqis in 2011, nearly 40,000 cases are currently being considered for resettlement in the United States. This would leave many Iraqis and their families waiting in limbo for a year or more. Additionally, this year the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported a 25% shortfall in the funding needed to provide basic necessities to Iraqi refugees in the region.

U.S. bishops have long called for a "responsible transition" in Iraq that minimizes further loss of human life, addresses the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and the refugee crisis in the region, stabilizes

Iraq, and protects the human rights of all Iraqis. Pope Benedict XVI lamented the ongoing violence and suffering in Iraq and called for the swift formation of a new government “so that the will of the people for a more stable and unified Iraq may be accomplished.” In his meeting with the new Ambassador of Iraq to the Holy See this year, he noted the need to improve security for all Iraqis, “particularly the various minorities,” and stressed that “among the rights that must be fully respected if the common good is to be effectively promoted, the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of worship are paramount.” Recognizing the difficult situation Christians face throughout the Middle East, the Pope convened a Synod of Bishops of the Middle East October 10-24 in Rome to help support the Christian community in the region.

In light of the concerns expressed by Pope Benedict XVI and the Catholic bishops of Iraq, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the U.S. government to continue to work with the Iraqi government to take strong steps to ensure that the criteria for a “responsible transition” become tangible goals. Those steps include:

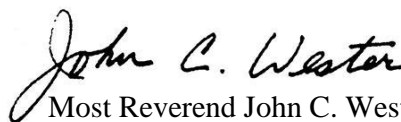
- a. Increasing regional and international efforts to assist the Iraqi government in training its military and police to provide security for all Iraqi citizens, including minorities, and in improving the judicial system and rule of law;
- b. Expanding reconciliation efforts, and promoting the protection of human rights, especially religious freedom, for all Iraqis;
- c. Developing long-term solutions to assist refugees in returning to Iraq or when return is not possible to resettle them in other countries, including taking substantially increased numbers in our own nation, and enabling internally displaced persons to return to their homes or be permanently relocated in safe communities; and
- d. Working with other donors, assisting the Iraqi government in building their capacity to develop the economy and revive the educational, health and social service infrastructure to benefit all Iraqis, insuring access to all, including minorities.

The Iraqis must take the lead in this time of transition, but the United States has continuing moral obligations that came with military intervention. We have a moral responsibility to help protect the lives and dignity of the Iraqi people and to assist them as they seek to recover from war and rebuild their nation.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International
Justice and Peace



Most Reverend John C. Wester
Bishop of Salt Lake City
Chairman, Committee on Migration

cc: Samantha Power, Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs, National Security Council
Eric P. Schwartz, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration,
Department of State