

Statement on the Attack on the Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad
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President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
November 1, 2010

The October 31 attack on the Syrian Catholic cathedral in Baghdad that killed 58 and wounded 75 has shocked and horrified the Catholic community and all people of goodwill. We join Pope Benedict XVI in expressing our profound sorrow at this savage violence and offer our heartfelt prayers for the victims, their families, and the Church and people of Iraq.

In the recent Synod on the Middle East, the bishops from Iraq spoke of the perilous situation facing Christians and other minorities in that country. They recalled: kidnappings for ransom; bombings of churches, schools, and other property occupied by Christians; threats to Christian-run businesses and livelihoods; and the death of Archbishop Rahho and other priests following kidnappings. Together with this most recent murderous attack, this pattern points to an appalling lack of basic security. Many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or have fled abroad in search of safety. Many have little hope of return to Iraq in the near future. The Synod called on the international community to help Iraq “put an end to the consequences of a deadly war and re-establish security, something which will protect all its citizens ...”

The United States bears responsibility for working effectively with the Iraqi government to stem the violence. Our Conference of Bishops raised grave moral questions prior to the United States military intervention in Iraq and then called for a “responsible transition.” While we welcomed the end of U.S.-led combat in Iraq, we share the Iraqi bishops’ concern that the United States failed to help Iraqis in finding the political will and concrete ways needed to protect the lives of all citizens, especially Christians and other vulnerable minorities, and to ensure that refugees and displaced persons are able to return to their homes safely. Having invaded Iraq, the U.S. government has a moral obligation not to abandon those Iraqis who cannot defend themselves.

At the conclusion of the Synod, the pope said, “Peace is possible. Peace is urgent. Peace is the indispensable condition for a life of dignity for individuals and society.”

We offer our prayers and solidarity with the suffering Christians of Iraq at this terrible time of loss and horrific violence. We stand with the bishops, Church and people of Iraq in their urgent search for greater security, freedom and protection. We call upon the United States to take additional steps to help Iraq protect its citizens, especially the most vulnerable.