



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND

Media Release for 07.11.2023

Archbishop Fears the Spread of War in Iraq

People in Iraq are filled with fear that the conflict in the Holy Land will spread throughout the region. This concern is expressed by Archbishop Bashar Warda, a prominent figure, who is urging governments worldwide to work towards peace. Archbishop Warda is particularly concerned that an escalation of this conflict could lead to another wave of migration, which would have devastating consequences for the already vulnerable Christian community, severely impacted by war and extreme poverty.

In an interview with Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), a Catholic charity dedicated to persecuted Christians, Archbishop Warda, who serves in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in Erbil, emphasizes the anxiety in Iraq about the potential spread of violence beyond Gaza.

He states, "On behalf of all the people, especially the minorities who often suffer more than others, particularly in conflict situations, we implore, God willing, that there be no more war."

The archbishop further adds, "We are appealing to all leaders and those with influence to help calm the situation. May God prevent this war from escalating beyond recent developments. Settling old scores could endanger the social fabric of the entire region. The situation in Syria remains unsettled, as does Iraq."

Archbishop Warda shares the uneasy state of his people and mentions that some are still uncertain about staying in the country due to recent violence and persecution carried out by groups such as Daesh (ISIS), Al Qaeda, and other extremist militants.

He points out that the wounds from the ISIS era have not yet healed and emphasizes the potential for more migration due to ongoing violence. The fear persists, and it's vital to remember that the previous war was less than a decade ago.

Before 2002, Iraq was home to over 1.2 million Christians, but due to persecution, violence, and poverty, there has been a mass exodus, and Archbishop Warda estimates that only around 150,000 Christians remain. He underscores the importance of the community for the Church, which relies on the presence of its people and is not structured like an NGO.

Archbishop Warda expresses his gratitude to organizations like ACN for providing emergency and pastoral assistance, especially during the years of crisis, culminating in the Daesh invasion of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, and the nearby Nineveh Plains, an ancient homeland for Christians.

He particularly highlights the current charity's support for the Pope Francis Scholarship Programme, which sponsors students at the Catholic University of Erbil, an institution founded by Archbishop Warda.

Archbishop Warda gave this interview during a visit to London, where he delivered a sermon at Westminster Abbey during an All Saints Day service, paying tribute to the martyrs of the Church. In his homily, the archbishop remembered the sacrifices made by many faithful individuals during the years of conflict with groups like Al Qaeda, Daesh (ISIS), and other militant terrorists. He also praised the heroism of martyrs, including his close friend Father Ragheed Ganni, who was tragically killed in June 2007 for refusing to close his church in Mosul.

To donate to Christians in the Holy Land visit www.aidtochurch.org/holyland or call 1800 101 201.

MEDIA INQUIRIES:

Contact:

Rose Gibson

Communications Coordinator – Aid to the Church in Need

E: media@aidtochurch.org

P: (02) 9167 9517 (direct)

www.aidtochurch.org