

**IRAQ: CHALDEAN PATRIARCHATE  
CALLS FOR DIALOGUE, JUSTICE  
AND UNITY TO REBUILD IRAQ**

AsiaNews (12.06.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2s3M77A> – The primate of the Iraqi Church, Mar Louis Raphael Sako, issued a statement on the website of the Chaldean Patriarchate marking the third anniversary of the fall of Mosul to Jihadi militias. In it, Mar Sako calls for “brave and responsible” dialogue to alleviate the suffering of those who lost their homes and property as a result of the rise of the Islamic State (IS) in northern Iraq. This requires “justice and equality” in the context of a “spirit of national unity” centred on the “public good” in accordance with the principles of the constitution.

The prelate mentioned again the “pain and tears” that Christians endure after fleeing their homes and land, a tragedy Iraqi Church leaders do not hesitate to call a genocide.

Meanwhile, the slow and demanding [process of reconstruction](#) has just begun.

In expressing gratitude to those who played a role in the liberation of parts of Mosul and the Nineveh Plain, especially the Iraqi military and Kurdish Peshmerga, the patriarchate referred to displaced Christians as well as their torched or destroyed homes and churches.

The statement goes on to say that rebuilding housing and infrastructure provides a great opportunity to offer the country “peace, security and stability”, and boost its unity, shaken by old and new autonomist tensions, including the demand by some Christians to set up an [enclave in the Nineveh Plain](#), which the patriarch opposes, as well as the [Kurdish independence referendum](#).

According to a recent report, up to 80 per cent of the original Christian population has left Iraq and Syria in recent years, due to war and escalating extremist Islamic movement. The trend began with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, accelerated with the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, and became a flood with the rise of the Islamic State in 2014 in northern Iraq.

Although it is difficult to come up with exact figures, it estimates that the number of Christians in Iraq has dropped from more than a million in 2003 to more than 300,000 in 2014 to between 200,000 and 250,000 at present. In Syria, the Christian population dropped to half from two million in 2011.

Iraqi and Syrian Christians are now losing hope for a safe future for them and that they no longer have enough reason to return. Some have found refuge in the region – especially Lebanon and Jordan – often in a situation of precariousness. Others have left for Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia, the main countries of the diaspora.

What is more, higher cost of living, lack of working and education opportunities, destruction of Christian towns, and the loss of community are other factors that have contributed to the exodus.

This has led to a new appeal for justice and help for Christians, especially for those who have decided to stay at home and contribute to the reconstruction work.

This month marks the third anniversary of Mosul’s occupation by Islamic State fighters. However, since last October, the Iraqi army has been engaged in an [offensive](#) with the support of Kurdish and Shia militias to retake the city.

The eastern parts of the city have been liberated, like almost the whole of Nineveh Plain, but there are still large pockets of resistance in western Mosul and the Old City. Fighting has already killed scores of civilians, often used as a human shield by the terrorists, and fueled an exodus of hundreds of thousands of people.

Last Thursday, Patriarch Sako visited the liberated areas of Mosul for the first time since the Islamic State seized the city. He was accompanied by his deputy, Mgr Basel Yaldo, and a delegation of politicians and military.

The prelate saw with his own eyes the situation of some of the city’s most important Christian landmarks. One of the places he visited was Holy Spirit Parish, where Chaldean priest [Fr Ragheed Ganni](#), and his three deacons were murdered in 2007.

During the visit (*pictured*), His Beatitude thanked the Iraqi armed forces for their fight against the Jihadi group and called for the protection of Christian towns in Nineveh Plain, including Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Karemlash and Bartella.