

December 24, 2009



President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

“The Christian presence in Iraq is likely to disappear on account of emigration prompted by successive waves of terrorism.” – Resolutions of 1st Iraqi Christian Leadership Conference on Refugees and IDPs, Baghdad, December 11-12, 2009.

Dear President Obama,

Earlier this month I returned to Baghdad to attend the 1st Iraqi Christian Leadership Conference on Refugees and IDPs. Over 120 lay and clerical Christian leaders living in Iraq, with the support of Vice-President Adel Abdul-Mahdi, convened to address the question “Do Christians have a future in Iraq?”

The pertinence of this question was underscored by the violence that surrounded the Conference. Five bombs in Baghdad killed 123 people and injured another 500 after I had embarked for Iraq. Shortly after the close of the Conference two churches in Mosul were bombed, killing five people and injuring 40 more. Only yesterday a bomb exploded outside St. Thomas’s Syriac Orthodox Church in Mosul, killing two.

This Christmas, many Iraqi churches will yet again stand empty and forlorn because in Iraq church attendance carries with it the risk of losing one’s life in an act of anti-Christian terror. The inability of the faithful to celebrate Christmas without fear from jihad-terror reflects the crisis of survival facing Iraq’s ancient Christian community.

Since the commencement of Operation Freedom Iraq in 2003, over 500 Christians, including bishops and priests, have been killed and 59 churches have been bombed. These acts of terror, combined with kidnappings, death threats, extortion, and anti-Christian social discrimination have prompted nearly half of Iraq’s one million Christians to flee the country and seek refuge abroad. Many of those who have remained in Iraq are internally displaced. Other Iraqi non-Muslim minorities experience similar persecution.

A process of “ethnic and religious cleansing” is underway in Iraq, to use the words of the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Kirkuk, Louis Sako. Unless the violence is brought to a rapid end and conditions are created for the safe and dignified return of refugees, Iraq’s Christian community will soon resemble the country’s once populous and prosperous Jewish community – now numbering fewer than ten people.

In the hope of averting communal extinction, the Christian Leadership Conference, called for:

- 1) The provision of security to the population throughout the country.
- 2) The elimination of all extra-legal militias.
- 3) The effective use of funds intended to help Iraqi refugees and IDPs return to their homes.
- 4) The development of infrastructure in secure parts of Iraq, such as the Christian villages of Nineveh Province, to enable them to accommodate returning refugees who cannot return to their own homes in insecure parts of Iraq.

5) Equality for all Iraqi citizens on the basis of common citizenship and action to eliminate all forms of religious bigotry and intolerance in society. 6) Bestowal of asylum status on all genuinely qualified Iraqi refugees in accordance with international instruments and the discouragement of the mass emigration of Christians and other minorities to the West.

The Conference Resolutions are broadly in harmony with two constructive Congressional initiatives: Senate Resolution 322 and House of Representatives Resolution 944 and on Religious Minorities in Iraq, submitted respectively by Sen. Carl Levin and Congressman Gary Peters.

Great hopes and expectations were raised inside Iraq shortly before the 2008 Presidential election when you expressed “concern about the safety and well-being of Iraq’s Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities”, stating:

Catholic Chaldeans, Syriac Orthodox, Assyrian, Armenian and Protestant Christians, as well as smaller, Yezidi and Sabeian Mandaean communities have paid a heavy price as a result of conflict in Iraq and continue to face a high level of threat and abuse. Moreover, Christian and other non-Muslim minorities continue to constitute a disproportionately high percentage of the Iraqi refugee population. In addition to these troubling trends, Christians and other non-Muslim religious minorities continue to face considerable difficulty in ensuring that they are adequately represented in Iraqi governmental institutions.” (Sen. Obama to Secretary Rice, September 26, 2008.)

The “troubling trends”, to which you referred, have not yet been reversed. I would therefore urge you deliver a Christmas message of hope. Acknowledgment of the propriety of the Senate and House Resolutions and the Resolutions of the Iraqi Christian Leadership Conference would send a signal of American resolve to address, together with the Iraqi Government and UN agencies, the crisis of survival facing Iraq’s Christian and other endangered minorities.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Eibner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Dr. John Eibner
CEO