

Faith Leaders Statement on the situation in Mosul, Iraq

Friday, August 1, 2014

We write as faith leaders in Canada deeply concerned about what is happening to religious minorities in the city of Mosul in Iraq, and in particular, the persecution of those who are Christian.

We condemn the threats directed to members of the ancient Christian communities and to other religious minorities in Mosul, threats made by the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The policies of ISIS are leading to an exodus of Christians from Mosul, forcing them to leave communities where their ancestors have lived for millennia. We stand with the Christian minority in Mosul Iraq at this time of great anxiety and fear. We hold them in our prayers. They will not be forgotten.

It is difficult to cite any society that has a perfect track record when it comes to protecting human rights. In Canada, our diverse communities generally live and work together peacefully, and are involved in local and national dialogues on issues of faith and social justice issues that concern Canadians, nationally and globally. And yet, with humility, we confess historic and ongoing injustices against First Nations peoples in Canada, and, as well, the marginalization and discrimination faced by other vulnerable groups in our communities. We continue in the long journey of addressing these injustices.

Mindful of our own imperfect history, and rooted in our commitment to justice, peace, and respect for human rights, we are compelled to speak out on what is happening in Mosul.

We uphold the right of all religious minorities, throughout the world, to be free to express and practise their faith, and to have this right respected by government and by other religious groups. The lifting up and enforcing of *Dhimmi*, an ancient understanding of Islam that treats Christians and Jews (among others) as second-class citizens, and presents them with the options of conversion, paying *Jizya* (a poll tax for non-Muslims) or death, is an unacceptable infringement of religious freedom. We call upon all people of good will to join us in condemning these actions.

Amplifying the voices of our faith partners in the Middle East and around the world:

- We condemn the persecution of Christians and other vulnerable groups in Mosul.
- The human rights of every citizen of Iraq—regardless of religious affiliation—must be respected, protected and promoted.
- We stand with Christians in the region who affirm that Middle East Christians are and wish to remain part and parcel of their societies in every way – nationally, culturally, socially and politically.
- Furthermore, we stand with Christians and other faith groups in the region who have been engaged in constructive dialogue with other religions and ethnic communities so that the pluralistic heritage of their societies is protected and ensured.
- We support partners in encouraging “non-military international support for the initiation of an inclusive political process to strengthen fundamental human rights, in particular with regard to religious freedom, to urgently establish the rule of law; and to ensure equal rights for all citizens.”

- We request governments and non-governmental organizations to come to the aid of people driven from their homeland because of their religious beliefs, and create conditions in Mosul and all of Iraq that enable the safe return of refugees and internally displaced people to their communities as soon as possible.

Common to most religious traditions is the injunction to treat others as we ourselves would want to be treated. We stand with all those committed to ensuring respect for the human rights of all.

Endorsed by:

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