

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 3, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today condemned Sunday’s terrorist attack on Baghdad’s Our Lady of Salvation Catholic church and expressed its sincere condolences to the victims and their families. Reports indicate that at least 40 worshippers, two priests, and 10 members of the Iraqi security forces were killed, and more than 60 people were wounded.

“This horrific attack is a sobering reminder of what all should already know—that Iraqi Christians clearly continue to face a grave terrorist threat,” said USCIRF chair Leonard Leo. “We recognize the promptness with which the Iraqi government responded to the hostage situation at the church, and it is most unfortunate that all of the hostages could not be safely rescued and that security forces were killed. In the wake of this brazen and senseless attack, we urge the Iraqi government to proactively heighten security at Christian and other minority religious sites and the United States government to increase its support of such efforts.”

“It also is time for the Obama administration to acknowledge the sectarian aspects of the conflict in Iraq, which are evident in this attack, and ensure that U.S.-Iraq policy prioritizes the plight of the country’s vulnerable religious minority communities,” continued Mr. Leo. “Congress already has taken this step, as reflected in House and Senate resolutions that call on the U.S. government to, among other measures, work with the Iraqi government to enhance security at places of worship and ensure that members of ethnic and religious minority communities do not suffer discrimination and can effectively convey their concerns to government. The administration should act accordingly as quickly as possible.”

Since 2008, USCIRF has recommended that Iraq should be designated as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations. Members of the country’s smallest religious minorities, including Christians, Mandaeans, and Yazidis, continue to suffer from targeted violence, threats, and intimidation. They also experience a pattern of official discrimination, marginalization, and neglect. Since 2003, many have fled to neighboring countries, where they represent a disproportionately high percentage of registered Iraqi refugees, and they are not returning. As a result, these ancient communities’ very existence in Iraq is threatened, thereby jeopardizing Iraq’s future as a secure, stable, and diverse democracy.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF

Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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