

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, DC - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today condemned the terrorist attack of December 14 against worshippers at a mosque in Chabahar, Iran, and similar attacks in Iraq, on the eve of the Shia Muslim festival of Ashura and called on governments in the region to be especially vigilant in protecting all religious worship during this holiday season.

“This is the latest of a long string of despicable attacks launched by the forces of extremism and intolerance against innocent religious worshippers in the region,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. “From Ashura to Christmas, public religious observances during this time of year continue to provide targets for religiously motivated violence in the Middle East and other parts of the world. We strongly urge greater protection for worshippers during this special season.”

Similar violence has struck Ashura celebrations in neighboring Iraq this year. Over the past few days, several attacks have targeted Shia pilgrims in Iraq, including a roadside bomb in Baghdad on Tuesday that killed at least 39. During last year’s Ashura observance in Iraq, a series of bombings killed at least 19 individuals and injured more than 100. A recent wave of attacks against Christians in Iraq, including the October 31 attack on Baghdad’s Our Lady of Salvation Church, also has heightened concern about the prospect for escalating attacks as the Christmas holiday approaches.

The Ashura holiday commemorates the death of Imam Hussein in 680 A.D.

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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