

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) condemns the recent spate of attacks in Iraq against Shi'a Muslims commemorating Arbaeen, a Shi'a holiday commemorating the death of the Prophet's grandson. On Thursday, two explosions targeted Shi'a pilgrims in the holy city of Karbala, killing at least 50 and wounding 150, and another attack against pilgrims on their way there killed one and wounded nine. In addition, on Tuesday Shi'a pilgrims were attacked near Baghdad.

“The continued targeting by terrorists of innocent religious worshippers in Iraq is appalling,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF Chair. “Clearly, the Iraqi government must do more to protect religious worshippers from religiously-motivated violence and to bring the perpetrators of such violence to justice.”

Over the past several months in Iraq, terrorists have attacked a Catholic Church in Baghdad during a mass, as well as Shi'a pilgrims observing Ashura.

USCIRF has recommended since 2008 that Iraq should be designated as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act for systematic, ongoing, egregious religious freedom violations, and has provided recommendations for ways the U.S. government can promote this human right. USCIRF has also repeatedly condemned terrorist attacks targeting religious communities, including Shi'a celebrating Arbaeen and Ashura, and has concluded the Iraqi government needs to provide more visible and effective protection to all religious communities in Iraq. Other recommended Iraqi government activities include investigating and prosecuting acts of sectarian violence, as well as promoting reconciliation and religious tolerance by maintaining an operational national human rights commission and facilitating interfaith conflict resolution and dialogue among Iraq's youth.

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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