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WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom today urged the U.S. and Iraqi governments to make security for Christians and other vulnerable religious minorities an important issue in their discussions on the presence of U.S. military trainers in Iraq after the end of this year.

“Tuesday’s bombing of a Syriac Christian church in Kirkuk and the attempted bombing of two other churches that day demonstrate that terrorists continue to target Iraqi civilians based on their religion or belief,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF Chair. “The ability to protect vulnerable religious minority sites and areas from such violence must be a priority for the Iraqi security forces, and for any U.S. training of those forces, going forward. Without such protection, Iraq’s smallest, most vulnerable religious minorities, such as Christians, Mandaeans, and Yazidis, will continue to flee their homeland.”

USCIRF also urges the Iraqi government to vigorously investigate Tuesday's attack and to arrest, prosecute, and punish the perpetrators, as it did following the deadly October 31, 2010 attack on Our Lady of Perpetual Help church in Baghdad.

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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