



# World Council of Churches

Written Statement by the Commission of Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches  
(CCIA/WCC)

Special Session on the human rights situation in Iraq

1 September 2014

A World Council of Churches' delegation is currently on mission in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The CCIA appreciates the convening of this special session of the UN Human Rights Council on the situation in northern Iraq – a situation which fully warrants the focussed and continuous attention of the entire international community.

Yesterday, in Erbil, the delegation visited church leaders – some themselves displaced from Mosul or elsewhere – representing the Chaldean Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and Armenian Orthodox churches; witnessed a distribution of essential food items to IDPs by a local NGO, and met people in emergency camps and shelters provided by local churches in churches, schools and even in an unfinished shopping mall. The delegation was able to speak to displaced people from the Christian, Yazidi and Kakaeine (Sufi) communities, all of whose stories illustrated in painful detail the brutality and inhumanity of the so-called 'Islamic State' (IS) – the lives taken, the injuries inflicted, the freedoms denied, and the properties and livelihoods destroyed.

We are particularly and most urgently concerned about approximately 100 people known to have remained in Quaraquosh when the town was taken by IS, some of whom are elderly and ill. An IS contact yesterday confirmed by phone that these people are indeed being held captive, despite rumours of their release. We will be providing to OHCHR a list we have received of names of some of these people for whatever urgent attention the UN system can give to these cases.

We fear especially for the women and girls in this group, having heard accounts of women held captive in cages, and bought and sold as slaves by IS jihadis. We also fear for the young men and boys caught up in this paroxysm of violence, and not only those from the religious minorities targeted by IS. We have heard a current account from a Muslim father in Mosul, of the grave and deteriorating humanitarian situation in the city under IS control, and of his fears that his sons may be dragooned as IS fighters.

We recognize and express our sincere appreciation of the hospitality and refuge provided by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to the displaced people, now estimated as exceeding 500,000 just from the most recent violence. But there is far too little aid from the international community for the scale of the needs. One local NGO we met estimated that barely 20% of the IDPs are receiving minimally adequate emergency support.

Beyond the immediate humanitarian crisis, we especially wish to emphasize the collective suffering of the religious minorities and the larger longer-term consequences of these tragic events. IS is destroying – indeed, in the areas under its control, has already destroyed – the presence and very identity of the religious minorities, tearing the social fabric and heritage of inter-religious co-existence in the region.

Mosul, for example, had an indigenous Christian presence since the dawn of Christianity. But now, there is no Christian left in the city, and the physical vestiges of this ancient community – the churches, monasteries and sacred texts – are being desecrated and destroyed.

From speaking to members of the displaced Christian community, and hearing of their sense of betrayal and insecurity, a return to Mosul and the re-establishment of their community there seems inconceivable. The cause and vision of inter-religious harmony and co-existence in the region has been dealt a life-threatening blow.

A key priority in redressing this situation must be that those who have provided financial and material support to IS, and who have promoted and disseminated the ideology that drives it and other such movements, be named and held accountable.

There must be an end to the culture of impunity in Iraq and in the whole region, and due consideration should be given to the possibility of creating a special tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Iraq and Syria.

Neutralizing the aggressive military capacity of IS, and rooting out its poisonous ideology, should be of utmost importance to the entire international community, but especially to our brothers, sisters and friends in Islam, in whose name IS commits its atrocities.

We ask that the Human rights Council:

- Calls for an urgent and substantial increase in humanitarian support from the international donor community to help meet the unmet emergency needs of the displaced populations.
- Recommends a further binding resolution by the Security Council containing effective measures to deprive IS of further funds and material support.
- Mandates an urgent mission and joint report by appropriate special procedures – including the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief – on the situation, drawing especially on testimony from members of the displaced religious minority communities and their religious leaders.