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# Cardinal urges US to protect Iraq Christians

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**WASHINGTON** -- The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops expressed solidarity and promised prayers for the Christians of Iraq "at this terrible time of loss and horrific violence."

In a Nov. 2 statement following the attack two days earlier on the Syrian Catholic cathedral in Baghdad, Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago said the U.S. government -- having invaded Iraq and later withdrawn all combat troops -- "has a moral obligation not to abandon those Iraqis who cannot defend themselves."

"While we welcomed the end of U.S.-led combat in Iraq, we share the Iraqi bishops' concern that the United States failed to help Iraqis in finding the political will and concrete ways needed to protect the lives of all citizens, especially Christians and other vulnerable minorities, and to ensure that refugees and displaced persons are able to return to their homes safely," the cardinal said.

George quoted many of the comments by Iraqi bishops at the recently concluded Synod of Bishops for the Middle East at the Vatican and recalled Pope Benedict XVI's closing remarks calling peace "an indispensable condition for a life of dignity for individuals and society."

"We stand with the bishops, church and people of Iraq in their urgent search for greater security, freedom and protection," he said. "We call upon the United States to take additional steps to help Iraq protect its citizens, especially the most vulnerable."

Armed militants wearing explosives stormed the Baghdad cathedral Oct. 31 during evening Mass.

The terrorists first set off a car bomb across the street in front of the Baghdad Stock Exchange, which left at least two people dead. Then they stormed the church and held parishioners and priests hostage.

The militants, who said they were part of the Islamic State of Iraq -- a group with suspected ties to al-Qaida -- demanded prisoners linked to al-Qaida be set free from detention in Iraq and Egypt and they threatened to blow up the church if military forces attempted to break the siege.

After a standoff that lasted hours, Iraqi forces stormed the cathedral and the ensuing firefight and a series of explosions left 58 people dead and 75 injured. The dead reportedly included at least two young priests.

**For more coverage, see**: Attack on Iraq church called example of intolerance toward Christians [1]

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