NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Iraqi archbishop speaks of 'near-genocide conditions'

Sarah MacDonald Catholic News Service | Mar. 17, 2011

DUNDALK, Ireland -- An Iraqi archbishop spoke of "near-genocide conditions" for Christians in his country and said those fleeing violence were straining resources in other parts of the country.

Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil, Iraq, said part of the problem was the country's "weak constitution, which tries to please two masters."

"We are living in a region which cannot decide if it is for democracy or Islamic law," he said March 16 at news conference sponsored by the Catholic charitable agency Aid to the Church in Need. The conference, at a pastoral center for the Archdiocese of Armagh, Northern Ireland, was to present the agency's new report on persecuted and forgotten Christians.

Archbishop Warda criticized "neighboring governments feeding insurgents with money and weapons to destabilize the Iraqi government" and said the rest of world's governments had "turned their backs on us, as if the human rights abuses and near-genocide conditions Iraqi Christians experience are temporary."

Archbishop Warda said that since the U.S.-led occupation of his country began in 2003, more than 500 Christians had been killed in religious and politically motivated violence.

Between 2006 and 2010, 17 Iraqi priests and two bishops were kidnapped and beaten or tortured. One bishop, four priests and three subdeacons were killed.

"In most cases, those responsible for the crimes stated they wanted Christians out of Iraq," the archbishop said.

Referring to the "systematic bombing campaign of Iraqi churches," he said 66 churches had been attacked or bombed; in addition, two convents, one monastery and a church orphanage also were bombed.

"The past is terrifying, the present is not promising, so everything is telling us that there is no future for Christians," Archbishop Warda later told Catholic News Service.

Describing the current situation in the Middle East as "boiling," he said Christians in the region "expect another war" due to the instability in so many countries and the ongoing tensions between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

He told those at the news conference that persecution of Christians was not restricted to Iraq, but it was apparent in places such as the Holy Land and Lebanon.

Referring to the findings in the Aid to the Church in Need report, the archbishop said, "In many countries, the situation for Christians seems to be worsening, sometimes to the point that we wonder if we will survive." He added that the place of Christians as one of the original inhabitants of the Middle East had been "wiped from collective memory."

Discussing the exodus of Christians from Iraq, he noted that during the first Gulf War, the Christian population

was estimated to be between 1.2 million and 1.4 million. By 2003, it had dropped by more than half a million. Iraq's Christian population now numbers less than 500,000, he said, and added that this figure was highly optimistic.

The archbishop also said that because of "systematic intimidation and violence" before last year's Iraqi elections, 4,000 Christian families had fled to Irbil. As a result churches, schools, health care facilities and housing were feeling the burden of increased population, he said.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/18/2015 - 20:08*): http://ncronline.org/news/iraqi-archbishop-speaks-near-genocide-conditions