



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

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Right Honourable Philip Hammond MP
The Foreign Secretary
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

12 August 2014

Dear Foreign Secretary

I have followed the unfolding disaster in Iraq with growing concern as both media reports and the testimony of Iraqi Christians illustrate the desperate threat posed by ISIL to many of Iraq's oldest communities. Christians and other religious minorities, above all the Yezidi, now face destruction as in areas such as Mosul, Sinjar and Qaraqush that had previously been relatively protected. This is a catastrophe not only for those tens of thousands of people directly affected but also for what hopes remain for Iraq as a plural society in which indigenous minorities will have any future.


I welcome the humanitarian efforts that Her Majesty's Government has made in the past few days and the professionalism of the RAF and other UK personnel in delivering aid in difficult conditions. I urge you to increase that relief operation as well as the crucial diplomatic efforts needed to create a political environment in which ISIL's offensive can be defeated. Over the last ten years, Iraqis of all communities have suffered terribly from the violence of extremists. For that brutality to stop there needs to be a sustained focus on creating a more stable society based on respect for fundamental human rights, especially freedom of religion, and the rule of law. Britain has a role to play in that and I ask that you increase the existing efforts made by the Foreign Office to promote a culture in which the dignity of the person is paramount.

For your information, I enclose with this letter a statement on the crisis in Iraq, signed by my fellow presidents of European bishops' conferences, and addressed to the members of the United Nations' Security Council. It illustrates the anguish of Europe's Catholics at what is happening in Iraq. That profound concern is expressed practically through the work of our relief agencies which, led by Iraqis and supported by Catholics from all over the world, provide vital

help to people of all communities. I know that our agencies cooperate with DFID and trust that relationship will deepen during this crisis.

Please be assured of my prayers and best wishes as you begin your leadership of the Foreign Office in such difficult and challenging circumstances.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

CC His Excellency Archbishop Antonio Mennini, Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain
Right Reverend Declan Lang, Chairman of the Department for International
Affairs, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales