



MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR ASSIGNMENT EDITORS

Cardinal Thomas Collins Condemns Treatment of Iraqi Christians

Tens of thousands displaced in effort to cleanse Iraq of Christian presence

TORONTO (August 8, 2014) Christians at home and around the world are offering prayers and pleading with government leaders to recognize a crisis expanding daily in Iraq, where tens of thousands of Christians are being forced out of their homes, receiving death threats and facing increased persecution.

Cardinal Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, in a statement released August 7, urged the Canadian government to employ full diplomatic influence with its Iraqi counterparts to provide protection for Christians remaining in their homeland. At the same time, he pressed immigration officials to streamline applications for those escaping a region inundated with violence and unrest.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, through the generosity of its parishes, is Canada's largest private sponsor of refugees from the Middle East, with 820 people welcomed from the region over the past three years.

Cardinal Collins described the atrocities faced by Christians in Iraq: "Scenes unfold daily of residents forced to flee their homes, stripped of their possessions, right down to the crosses around their necks, while others are murdered, martyrs literally laying down their lives for their faith."

Toronto's archbishop has encouraged parishes to join in solidarity with those suffering by:

- Contributing to emergency aid efforts being coordinated by the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), a papal agency offering humanitarian and pastoral support for Christians persecuted worldwide. (www.cnewa.org)
- Joining in prayer and advocacy efforts. These include:
 - A peaceful protest in downtown Toronto organized by Catholic, Orthodox and Assyrian churches on Sunday, August 10 – 3:30 p.m. (originating at Front & Bay Sts., concluding at Queen's Park)
 - Ongoing prayers in Catholic churches throughout the archdiocese
 - Participation in an interfaith "Prayer for Peace" service hosted by Cardinal Collins, taking place on Sunday, September 7 at Toronto's St. Paul's Basilica at 3 p.m.

The Archdiocese of Toronto is Canada's largest diocese, stretching from Toronto north to Georgian Bay and from Oshawa to Mississauga. It is home to 1.9 million Catholics and 225 churches, with Mass celebrated in more than 30 languages each week.

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****Note:** Media contact for August 10 event: Sarmad Gorial (416) 712-6587**