

After praying with Middle East church leaders at Lambeth Palace today, the Archbishop spoke out in solidarity with Christians and other minorities being persecuted in the Middle East.

"A new situation has arisen which creates a state of emergency in the Middle East for Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities. The recent increase in violence and aggression has resulted in gross violations of the fundamental rights and freedoms in the region. We gather today as Christians, including those originally from the Middle East, to stand in solidarity and prayer with our brothers and sisters, who seek to practice their faith and belief in lands where they have been a continuing presence since the beginning of Christianity.

"The Middle East is the birthplace of Christianity, and home to indigenous Christian communities that have been an indispensable part and of its history. Despite the challenges, Christians in the region were and are a stabilising and reconciling presence. Today, particularly in Iraq and Syria, they are at great risk from violence fostered by extremist ideologies which no longer see them as being part of the future. The Middle East is in desperate danger of losing an irreplaceable part of its identity, heritage, and culture.

"We are seeing an extreme religious ideology that knows no limits in its persecution of those who are culturally or religiously different. Those who promote this intolerance must be challenged and the perpetrators of violence held to account without impunity. The suffering of those who bear the brunt of its terror requires us to act and bear witness to their plight, whatever ethnic group or religious minority they come from. We must provide relief and safety for those displaced and in fear of their lives, in consultation with our partners in the region. We must also bring pressure to bear on those who can provide security to those affected.

"In meeting and praying together, we give thanks for our brothers and sisters as they continue to live their Christian faith with strength and perseverance. We commit to continue to stand with them in prayer, to speak for freedom in the persecution for Christians and all other religious communities and those of no faith who live as minority groups across the region. We also continue to urge Her Majesty's Government to work within the international community to safeguard and provide for all those affected.

"To our brothers and sisters in the Middle East, we use these words: We 'share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patience and the endurance.' (Revelation 1:9)"

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