

Vatican official urges Iraq's Christians to forgive, rebuild

Author:

By NICOLE WINFIELD | AP

ID:

1546003931156989000

Fri, 2018-12-28 (All day)

VATICAN CITY: The Vatican secretary of state urged Iraqi Christians who have endured years of extremist persecution to forgive, reconcile and rebuild their broken communities as he celebrated Mass Friday in Iraq's largest Christian town.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin has spent the Christmas holidays in Iraq in a show of Pope Francis' solidarity with the region's Christian minorities, many of whom were forced to flee their homes during the years of extremist violence. Parolin celebrated Mass in the Al-tahera Syro-Catholic Cathedral in Qaraqosh, which was overtaken by Daesh group in 2014. In his homily, Parolin praised those who had refused to renounce their faith and instead resisted and went into exile.

"In God's saving plan, your sacrifices will not be without fruit, as fruitful as the witness of so many martyrs who, from the first centuries of Christianity, bathed this land with their blood and lived their faith heroically to the end," he said.

He urged those families who are now returning not to dwell on revenge but to instead forgive those who wronged them, reconcile and rebuild. Many of the Christian communities of northern Iraq are some of the oldest of the faith, where dialects of Aramaic – the language of Jesus – are still spoken.

"May the pain and violence you have endured never turn into bitterness, and may the heavy yoke of hatred never fall on your shoulders," Parolin told the Iraqi religious leaders and faithful in the cathedral. "Forgiveness is the basis of reconciliation."

In the two years that Daesh held Qaraqosh, militants burned down its churches, destroyed its religious altars and statues, and forced residents to convert or flee. By the time Iraqi forces retook it in 2016, Qaraqosh was practically deserted. Hundreds of families have since returned, and the global Christian community has donated generously to rebuild the churches. There aren't reliable census figures to go by, but by all accounts Qaraqosh was once Iraq's largest Christian town with a population of around 50,000 inhabitants.

But Iraq's Christian numbers have been dwindling since the 2003 US invasion, after which Christians of northern Iraq endured attacks by fundamentalist extremist groups – foremost among them Al-Qaeda.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Iraqi Christians celebrate Christmas one year after Daesh defeat
Iraqis demand US troop pullout

Record number of Australians receive online safety education

A record number of young Australians received online safety education in 2017-18 with almost 200,000 students attending ThinkUKnow presentations across the country.

Palestinian PM briefs Arab youth delegation on life under occupation

Thu, 2018-12-27 21:57

AMMAN: The four-day “Towards Victory for Jerusalem” conference in Ramallah, featuring a delegation of youths from seven Islamic countries, concluded on Thursday.

The conference, co-sponsored by the Arab League, was held under the patronage of Jibril Rajoub, head of the Palestinian Football Association and Olympic Committee, and secretary-general of the Fatah Central Committee.

Participants – who came from Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, Libya, Kuwait, Qatar, and Mauritania – toured various areas of Palestine, and spent Dec. 25 in Bethlehem. Before the conference’s final session, they were guests of Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah in Ramallah.

A government press release said that Hamdallah “gave a review of the political situation and the suffering under occupation and he spoke about efforts toward national reconciliation as well as international efforts to create a mini state in Gaza.”

Hamdallah called on Hamas “to respond positively to the reconciliation initiative of President Mahmoud Abbas so that Palestinians can face these efforts against the Palestinian cause in a united way,” the statement said.

FASTFACT

A youth delegation from seven Arab countries participated in a four-day conference in Ramallah titled ‘Towards victory for Jerusalem,’ which was concluded on Thursday.

Speaking about Jerusalem in the opening session, Rajoub said that Palestinians and Arabs are united over Jerusalem.

“There is consensus about the Arab context of Jerusalem, which Palestinians – both Christians and Muslims – continue to defend,” he said. He went on to praise “the heroes” who have defended the city over the years, and referred to Jerusalem as “a mosaic of Palestine where Muslims and Christians are living together and fighting for the city’s independence.”

The delegates also heard speeches from a number of leaders and experts from Jerusalem. Hanna Issa, secretary-general of the Islamic Christian Committee for Jerusalem and the Holy Sites, told Arab News that the delegates visited historic sites in Jerusalem and Nablus, Bethlehem and Hebron and witnessed firsthand the reality of life for Palestinians.

“I told the delegates that it is great to see active young people from Arab countries coming to visit their peers in Palestine and that (there should be) further visits that aim at strengthening relations with Jerusalem and Palestine.”

On the closing day, Rajoub expressed his deep appreciation to the delegation for their visit. “The Arab League clearly supports these visits which we hope

will continue and increase,” he said, noting that Israel had prevented delegates from Tunisia and Morocco from attending the conference.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Palestine](#)

Palestinian security forces block press conference by parliament speaker
After difficult year, Palestinians pessimistic about future prospects for peace

[Chadian group attacks forces loyal to Haftar in southern Libya](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-27 21:32

BENGAZI: A Chadian armed group attacked a military camp of forces loyal to Gen. Khalifa Haftar in southern Libya on Thursday, killing one and injuring 13 others, a local official said.

After the toppling of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in the NATO-backed uprising in 2011, fighters from neighboring Chad and Sudan joined the ensuing turmoil. Competing Libyan armed factions frequently accuse each other of deploying mercenaries from sub-Saharan Africa.

The attack took place near Traghan, 902 km south of Tripoli and about 400 km north of the border with Chad. A spokesman for the Traghan municipality said the man killed was a fighter loyal to the Haftar-allied, eastern government in Libya.

Since disputed elections and an escalation of fighting in 2014 there have been two governments in Libya, the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli and a rival government in the east.

The attack on the military camp on Traghan's outskirts was thwarted by mid-day, the spokesman, Khalid Chataoui, said, noting that hospitals in the city are underequipped to treat the injured.

There was no comment from Haftar's Libya National Army (LNA) on the attack.

The east-west division has split key institutions and produced a deadlock between the rump parliaments aligned with rival, shifting military factions.

On Tuesday, three suicide bombers attacked Libya's Foreign Ministry building in Tripoli.

Apart from the attackers, three people were killed and at least 21 injured in the attack, according to the Health Ministry.

Foreign Minister Mohamed Taher Siala said security arrangements agreed between GNA and the UN after a month of clashes in the south of Tripoli are yet to be implemented.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Libya](#)

Libya's chaos continues to feed extremist threat Saudi Arabia condemns

terrorist attacks in Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq

[Journalists join Sudan protests, announce three-day strike](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-27 21:30

A network of Sudanese journalists went on strike on Thursday in the wake of deadly protests sparked by a hike in bread prices, while opposition groups called for further rallies.

Angry crowds have taken to the streets in the capital Khartoum and several other cities since Dec. 19, leading to a crackdown in which a number of protesters have been killed.

"We declare a three-day strike from Dec. 27 to protest against the violence unleashed by the government against demonstrators," said the Sudanese Journalists' Network which advocates free speech.

Sudanese authorities say eight protesters have been killed in clashes, but Amnesty International has put the death toll at 37.

The Popular Congress Party, which is part of President Omar Bashir's government, says that 17 people have been killed and 88 wounded in clashes.

Journalists in Sudan frequently complain of harassment from the authorities, and the African country has a dire rating on international press freedom rankings.

Entire print runs of newspapers are often confiscated over articles deemed offensive by the powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), which is spearheading the current crackdown on protesters.

Police and security officers remained deployed in several parts of the Sudanese capital on Wednesday, but for the first day in a week no new demonstrations were reported.

Activists and opposition groups have called on people to take to the streets again over the next few days. "We urge the Sudanese people to continue their demonstrations until success is achieved by overthrowing the regime," the Sudanese Communist Party said in a statement.

Egypt minister visits

Egypt's foreign minister and intelligence chief visited Khartoum on Thursday for talks with Sudanese government officials in the midst of the ongoing deadly protests.

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Gen. Abbas Kamel went into meetings with their Sudanese counterparts soon after arriving, officials said, adding the two were later expected to meet Bashir.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry said earlier that the talks were part of "directives by the leaders of both countries to develop bilateral relations."

The visit follows more than a week of demonstrations in Sudan that evolved into deadly clashes between riot police and protesters angered by increased bread prices.

Cairo and Khartoum have recently sought to iron out their differences in a bid to improve relations roiled by a longstanding border dispute and an impasse in talks over Ethiopia's Nile dam.

In October Sudan lifted a ban on agricultural imports from Egypt during a visit to Khartoum by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Several members of the party have been arrested by security agents since the protests started.

"We also call on all opposition parties to unite and work together to coordinate this movement."

Protests initially started in towns and villages and later spread to Khartoum, as people rallied against the government tripling the price of a loaf of bread from one Sudanese pound to three (from about 2 two 6 US cents).

Demonstrators have also been marching against Sudan's dire economic situation and some have called for the president to resign.

After the protests erupted Bashir, who has been in power since a 1989 coup, vowed to "take real reforms" to tackle the country's financial difficulties.

Sudan is facing an acute foreign currency crisis and soaring inflation, despite the lifting of an economic embargo by Washington in October 2017.

Inflation is running at 70 percent and the Sudanese pound has plunged in value, while shortages of bread and fuel have regularly hit several cities.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Sudan](#)

Sudan Islamist party urges probe into killing of protesters
Egypt foreign minister, spy chief visit protest-hit Sudan