



Archdiocese of Vancouver
ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE

November 12, 2010

Reverend Sarmad Biloues
Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish
10460 – 139th Street
Surrey, BC V3T 4L5

Dear Father Sarmad:

I am writing to you and the Iraqi community to express my spiritual closeness at this time of suffering.

After 2,000 years of existence, the Christian community and other religious minorities in your country are asking themselves whether they have any future in that war-torn part of the world.

There are realistic predictions that the Christians who remain in Iraq are headed toward extinction in the wake of Muslim extremist violence against them. As persecution – from forced conversions to assassinations, intensifies against them – it is likely the number of Christians will continue to dwindle.

While the prime minister of Iraq has pledged to increase security around monasteries and churches, there are reports of more slayings, even after last week's slaughter at a Baghdad church during Mass.

Although individual countries are accepting Iraqi refugees, the reaction from the United Nations and other world organizations has been tepid.

I am grateful that Canada accepts many refugees, but it must open its doors further to accommodate those fleeing your homeland. In particular, it can encourage the visa application process so the handling of family class applications does not slow down refugee sponsorship cases. In addition to setting family reunification as a priority, the Canadian government should also set additional target numbers for Iraqi refugees, as it did during the Kosovo crisis and the war in Sierra Leone. This country can also assist in diplomatic efforts to form a stable coalition to govern Iraq, knowing

that ultimately a fair and stable government will go a long way toward reining in the violence in that country.

As you know, Iraqi Christians are the single largest group of refugees being assisted by the Archdiocese of Vancouver, and I can assure you that we stand ready to do more.

I encourage you to keep all the people of Iraq in your prayers, and also to join with them in solidarity.

There is also much practically that can be done to help, from providing clean water to health care. Those who wish to help may want to contact the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (www.cnewacanada.ca) which is the agency of the Holy See with a special mission to support Eastern Churches.

In remembrance of the victims of the October 31 terrorist attack on the Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad, I am pleased that you are joining in a Prayer Vigil and Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Surrey.

Unfortunately I am unable to join you on this occasion but offer you the assurance of my prayers and blessing,

With cordial greetings, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Michael Miller CSB". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver