

British Muslims and Christians jointly condemn Iraq church attack

by [Martin Revis](#)

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London, November 16 (ENInews)--Christian and Muslim leaders in Britain have joined in support of Christian communities in Iraq following the latest attack by extremists in the name of Islam, which resulted in the death of almost 60 worshippers at Our Lady of Salvation cathedral in Bagdad.

A statement issued on 15 November by Britain's Christian Muslim Forum, following a meeting two days earlier at the Al-Khoei Foundation Mosque in London attended by representatives of Christian, Islamic and Jewish bodies, "condemned in the strongest terms, all criminal acts committed by terrorists who seek to hijack the high values of Islam".

The statement noted, "We stand shoulder to shoulder with Iraqi Christians to confront the terror and fear that this important part of Iraqi society now faces, emphasising that these terrorist attacks will not succeed in dividing us and destroying the great values that we share, and our long history of peaceful coexistence."

In Antelias, Lebanon, on 16 November Aram I, who heads the Catholicosate of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church, said he had told North American journalists how the ancient local churches of the Middle East, which had been rooted in the region for more than 17 centuries, "have contributed to its economic, intellectual, and cultural development".

The former moderator of the World Council of Churches, Aram said, "Christians in the Middle East have always lived with challenges. The history of Christians in the Middle East has been a history of 'living martyrdom'. They have witnessed their faith through their participation in their societies living the message and values born in Bethlehem. What

is happening today is a continuation of the same journey, continuation of Christian witness in the Middle East."

In the United States, Catholic bishops said last week that their country had failed to help Iraq develop the means and political will to protect its citizens, particularly Christians.

"Having invaded Iraq, our nation has a moral obligation not to abandon those Iraqis who cannot defend themselves," Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote in a letter to President Barack Obama, released on 11 November, Religion News Service reported.

Al-Qaida gunmen killed 58 worshippers and wounded 75 more in an attack on 31 October during a service at the Syrian Catholic cathedral in the Iraqi capital.

Britain's Christian Muslim Forum had earlier called for governments of Muslim countries to make every effort to protect their Christian communities, and for the British Government to recognise the legitimate case for asylum of Christians fleeing persecution and death threats in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, in a message to Christians in Iraq read at a 12 November commemorative service in London after the cathedral attack, declared, "We hope and pray with all our hearts that there may be an end to this kind of sacrilegious butchery, and to all intimidation and violence against Christians and other minorities in Iraq."

The leader of Britain's Roman Catholics, Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols, also pledged support for Iraqi Christians, and expressed horror at the atrocity.

Last week, the London-based exiled archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Iraq, Athanasios Dawood, called on Britain to grant Christian Iraqis asylum. He told the national broadcaster, the BBC, that since the U.S.-led invasion there had been no protection for Christians, and that promises of democracy and human rights had not been fulfilled by the

invaders.

Still, the Rev. Andrew White, vicar of St George's, the only Anglican church in Iraq, told the BBC that his parishoners were still coming to church and intended to stay in the country, even though they were "petrified".