Eastern Catholic patriarchs denounce Islamic State's 'crimes against humanity'

by Josephine McKenna

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) The patriarchs and church leaders of Eastern Catholic churches have denounced as "crimes against humanity" the violence committed by the Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria.

In a statement issued Friday (August 29), the patriarchs condemned the persecution and killing of Christians, Yazidis and other minorities, saying Christians in the region were being threatened by what was described as the jihadi group's campaign of terror.

Meeting outside the Lebanese capital Beirut, the patriarchs called on the international community to stop the "criminal actions" of the Islamic State militants and urged Islamic institutions to forcefully condemn the extremist group.

Last week, Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai of Lebanon visited Christian and Yazidi refugees in Erbil, in northern Iraqi Kurdistan. He joined calls from Chaldean Patriarch Louis Sako to stop the massacre of innocent civilians.

Earlier in August, the Eastern patriarchs issued a statement saying Christians in countries of the Middle East are suffering from harsh persecution and being kicked out of their homes and lands by extremists.

"We call upon the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Conference, the U.N. Security Council, and the International Criminal Court to take swift, effective and immediate salvaging action," the statement said.