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Press Release of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development: Meeting on the Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian crisis

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is sponsoring a meeting on the Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian crisis, to take place on 13 and 14 September in the John Paul II Auditorium of the Pontifical Urban University. More than fifty Catholic charitable organizations, representatives of the local episcopates and ecclesial institutions and religious congregations operating in Syria, Iraq and neighbouring countries, as well as the apostolic nuncios in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey, will attend the meeting.

On the first day, the work will be introduced by Msgr. Segundo Tejado Muñoz, under-secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, by an address from Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, prefect of the same Dicastery, and the presentation of the Report of the Inquiry on the response of ecclesial institutions to the Syrian and Syrian humanitarian crisis in 2017-2018, carried out by the Dicastery. This will be followed by an intervention by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, and updates on the political and humanitarian situation by the apostolic nuncio in Syria, Cardinal Mario Zenari, and the apostolic nuncio in Iraq and Jordan, H.E. Msgr. Alberto Ortega Martín. The day will end with a report by Dr. Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who will speak, in particular, on the challenges and prospects of the current migration situation in the crisis area.

On the morning of 14 September, the participants will meet in working groups to concentrate on the concrete aspects of the collaboration between the different subjects involved in the response to the crisis. The afternoon session will instead be dedicated to the delicate theme of the return to the communities of origin by migrants and refugees. After interventions by Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, and Fr Fabio Baggio, under-secretary of the Department for Promoting Integral Human Development - Migrants and Refugees Section, the participants will meet again in working groups, dedicated to the specific theme of the session.

After the debate on group work, the conclusions of the meeting will be entrusted to Cardinal Turkson.

On Friday, September 14, an audience with the Holy Father is scheduled at the Apostolic Palace.

The aim of the meeting, in continuity with the path undertaken over the last six years, is to offer a moment of reflection and fraternal communion among all the ecclesial institutions involved in charity and assistance for the populations affected by this humanitarian crisis, to which the Holy Father has repeatedly drawn public attention; to draw up a “balance sheet” of the work done so far by Catholic charitable organizations in the context of the crisis, sharing information on the evolution of the humanitarian situation and the Church’s responses; to discuss the critical issues that have emerged and identify priorities for the future; and to analyze the situation of the Christian communities residing in the countries affected by the war, promoting synergy between ecclesial bodies, religious Congregations and the dioceses. Particular reflection will be devoted this year to the realistic prospects of a voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their communities of origin.

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has produced one of the most serious humanitarian crises of recent decades. The Holy See, in addition to diplomatic activity, actively participates in humanitarian aid and assistance programs. Since 2014, the ecclesial network has allocated more than 1 billion dollars to the emergency response, reaching more than 4 million individual beneficiaries per year. According to UN sources, there are currently more than 13 million people in need of aid in Syria and almost 9 million in Iraq; there are over 6 million internally displaced persons in Syria and 2 million in Iraq, while there are 5.6 million Syrian refugees registered in neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Voluntary returns to Iraq would amount to 3.9 million people at present.
