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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Iraq (5 to 8 March 2021) - Meeting with the President and Prime Minister of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan and Prayer of Suffrage for the victims of the war in Hosh-al-Bieaa

Welcome from the President of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan and the religious and civil leaders of the Region, and meeting with the President and Prime Minister

This morning, after leaving the apostolic nunciature, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to Baghdad International Airport, where he departed on board an Iraqi Airways aircraft bound for Erbil.

Upon arrival the Pope was received by Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda of Erbil of the Chaldeans, Archbishop Nizar Semaan of Hadiab-Erbil of the Syrians, the President of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, and various civil and religious leaders. Then, after a brief meeting in the Presidential VIP Lounge of the airport with the archbishops of Erbil of the Chaldeans and of Hadiab-Erbil of the Syrians, and with the President and the Prime Minister of the Autonomous Region, Pope Francis took his leave and departed by helicopter for Mosul.

In Mosul the Pope was received by Archbishop Najeeb Michael, O.P., of Mosul and Aqra of the Chaldeans, the governor of Mosul and two children who offered him flowers. He then proceeded by car to *Hosh-al-Bieaa* for the prayer of suffrage for the victims of the war.

Prayer of Suffrage for the victims of the war in Hosh-al-Bieaa

Greeting of the Holy Father

Prayer of the Holy Father

At 10.10 local time (8.10 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis arrived in Hosh-al-Bieaa, the Four Churches Square

(Syro-Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syro-Orthodox, and Chaldean), destroyed between 2014 and 2017 in terrorist attacks, for the prayer of suffrage for the victims of the war.

Upon arrival the Pope was received by Archbishop Najeeb Michael, O.P., of Mosul and Aqra of the Chaldeans, and proceeded with him to the centre of Hosh-al-Bieaa.

After the introductory greeting of the Archbishop and testimonies from a priest and a Sunni, the Holy Father addressed his greeting to those present and recited a prayer of suffrage for the victims of the war.

At the end of the moment of prayer, after the unveiling of the plaque commemorating the visit, followed by the release of a white dove and the final blessing, the Holy Father greeted various religious and civil leaders.

Before leaving Mosul, Pope Francis visited the ruins around Hosh-al-Bieaa, and paused in prayer before the ruins of the Syro-Catholic Church. He then transferred by car to the take-off area and, after bidding farewell to the Archbishop of Mosul and Aqra of the Chaldeans and the governor of Mosul, departed by helicopter for Qaraqosh.

The following are the Pope's greeting and prayer in Hosh-al-Bieaa:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Dear Friends,

I thank Archbishop Najeeb Michael for his kind words of welcome and I am especially grateful to Father Raid Kallu and Mr Gutayba Agha for their moving testimonies.

Thank you very much, Father Raid. You told us of the forced displacement of many Christian families from their homes. The tragic diminution of Jesus' disciples here and across the Middle East does incalculable harm not just to the individuals and communities concerned but also to the society they leave behind. Indeed such a richly diverse cultural and religious fabric as this is weakened by the loss of any of its members, however small. As in one of your intricately designed carpets, one small thread torn away can damage the rest. Father, you told us of your fraternal relationship with Muslims after returning to Mosul. You were met with welcome, respect and cooperation. Thank you, Father, for having shared these signs that the Spirit is making blossom in the desert, and for showing us that it is possible to hope in reconciliation and new life.

Mr Agha, you reminded us that the real identity of this city is that of harmonious coexistence between people of different backgrounds and cultures. I especially welcome, then, your invitation to the Christian community to return to Mosul and to take up their vital role in the process of healing and renewal.

Today all of us raise our voices in prayer to Almighty God for all the victims of war and armed conflict. Here in Mosul, the tragic consequences of war and hostility are all too evident. How cruel it is that this country, the cradle of civilization, should have been afflicted by so barbarous a blow, with ancient places of worship destroyed and many thousands of people – Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, who were cruelly eliminated by terrorism, and others – forcibly displaced or killed!

Today, however, we reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace more powerful than war. This conviction speaks with greater eloquence than the passing voices of hatred and violence, and it can never be silenced by the blood spilled by those who pervert

the name of God to pursue paths of destruction.

Prayer of the Holy Father

The Holy Father introduces the prayer:

Before we pray in this city of Mosul for all the victims of war, in Iraq and in the entire Middle East, I would like to share with you these thoughts:

If God is the God of life – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to kill our brothers and sisters in his Name.

If God is the God of peace – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to wage war in his Name.

If God is the God of love – for so he is – then it is wrong for us to hate our brothers and sisters.

Let us now join in praying for all the victims of war. May Almighty God grant them eternal life and unending peace, and welcome them into his fatherly embrace. Let us pray too for ourselves. May all of us – whatever our religious tradition – live in harmony and peace, conscious that in the eyes of God, we are all brothers and sisters.

Prayer:

Most High God, Lord of all ages, you created the world in love and never cease to shower your blessings upon your creatures. From beyond the sea of suffering and death, from beyond all temptations to violence, injustice and unjust gain, you accompany your sons and daughters with a Father's tender love.

Yet we men and women, spurning your gifts and absorbed by all-too-worldly concerns have often forgotten your counsels of peace and harmony. We were concerned only with ourselves and our narrow interests. Indifferent to you and to others, we barred the door to peace. What the prophet Jonah heard said of Nineveh was repeated: the wickedness of men rose up to heaven (cf. *Jonah* 1:2). We did not lift pure hands to heaven (cf. *1 Tim* 2:8), but from the earth there arose once more the cry of innocent blood (cf. *Gen* 4:10). In the Book of Jonah, the inhabitants of Nineveh heeded the words of your prophet and found salvation in repentance. Lord, we now entrust to you the many victims of man's hatred for man. We too implore your forgiveness and beg the grace of repentance:

Kyrie eleison! Kyrie eleison! Kyrie eleison!

[Brief moment of silence]

Lord our God, in this city, we see two signs of the perennial human desire for closeness to you: the Al-Nouri Mosque, with its Al-Hadba minaret, and the Church of Our Lady of the Hour, whose clock for more than a century has reminded passersby that life is short and that time is precious. Teach us to realize that you have entrusted to us your plan of love, peace and reconciliation, and charged us to carry it out in our time, in the brief span of our earthly lives. Make us recognize that only in this way, by putting it into practice immediately, can this city and this country be rebuilt, and hearts torn by grief be healed. Help us not to pass our time in promoting our selfish concerns, whether as individuals or as groups, but in serving your loving plan. And whenever we go astray, grant that we may heed the voice of true men and women of God and repent in due time, lest we be once more overwhelmed by destruction and death.

To you we entrust all those whose span of earthly life was cut short by the violent hand of their brothers and sisters; we also pray to you for those who caused such harm to their brothers and sisters. May they repent,

touched by the power of your mercy.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

May they rest in peace. Amen.
