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August 8, 2014

“We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be.” USCCB on Solidarity

Your Eminence and Excellencies,

Peace and blessing to you. I pray this letter finds you all well on this Feast of Saint Dominic. May his powerful intercession continue to strengthen you in your ministry of preaching the Good News to your flocks.

With a grateful heart, I want to express my deep gratitude to all of you and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for your solidarity and prayerful support to the people of Iraq, who have suffered such a catastrophic tragedy in recent weeks.

By birth, I am Assyrian from Ninevah’s province, born and raised in Iraq. As a daughter of the Church, the Lord has blessed me to serve Him as an American citizen in the Archdiocese of Boston and beyond. I am blessed to be part of two beloved nations that are very dear to my heart. It is a privilege to be so deeply united with both of my families, the Iraqis and the Americans.

As a servant of God and His people, I have served the Iraqi people from a very young age all through four wars, from 1980 to 2003. In those years, inspired by the teaching of Blessed Charles de Foucauld on universal brotherhood, I made an effort to learn four other local languages besides my Aramaic native language in order to be of service to all: Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Chaldeans, and Armenians. Given the large percentage of Muslim communities in Iraq, I also chose to study Islam according to the tradition of both Shias and Sunnis, for two years so as to be of service to them. Through those years of serving in various villages and among many different ethnic groups and tribes, I became a strong believer of the power of solidarity that creates a bridge for healing and reconciliation.

The devastating reality of the last month and a half in Iraq stirred up in my heart the old memories from my homeland. In the last few weeks, despite the darkness of hatred, revenge, persecution, humiliation and death, I could not let go of the hope that the light of healing, reconciliation, human respect and honor of each others’ religion and tradition, that I saw for decades of growing up in a land that is made up of all these tribes, ethnic groups, and religious communities, would not be extinguished. It was my confidence in this hope that led me to reach out to most of you, other religious and humanitarian organizations, and most of all, to have a daily contact with the Catholic leaders in Iraq.

Though I consider myself like a small voice crying in the wilderness of so much pain, I am confident that *“the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”* This light of my hope has never diminished because of each one of you, your powerful prayers and spiritual support to the people of Iraq, and your leadership in raising awareness about the need to pray for peace.

This morning, after reading the announcement from the USCCB about encouraging all the Catholic Dioceses in America to pray in a special way for peace in Iraq on August 17th, I was moved to tears of gratitude on behalf of all my beloved people in Iraq. I immediately called Patriarch Louis Raphaël I Sako, the Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church and Archbishop Yousif Thomas Mirkis O.P., Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah, to let them know of your initiative and your way of expressing the solidarity of our Catholic Church in America with the people of Iraq. It was very comforting to them to know that the prayer composed by the Patriarch himself was published on your website.

After reading your words of prayer and solidarity with the people of Iraq, I wanted to take this time to write to you on behalf of all the many Iraqis whom I served and encountered- Clergy, Religious, and laity, young and old, men and women, Christian, Muslims, Yazidis, Mandaeans and others- to thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping the Iraqi people who have lost everything and suffered tremendously. Your spiritual support is helping them to know they are not abandoned but that they have thousands of brothers and sisters praying for them in the Church of America.

Your initiative of prayer and outreach to the people of Iraq in these crucial times is a manifestation of Saint John Paul II's words from the conclusion of the Interreligious Assembly (On the Eve of the Third Millennium: Collaboration among the Diverse Religions) on October 28, 1999: *"I have always believed that religious leaders have a vital role to play in nurturing that hope of justice and peace without which there will be no future worthy of humanity."* Thank you for being such an instrument of grace, not only to the people of Iraq, but also to many other Iraqis who are living now in the United States.

Thank you for giving us a renewed hope that comes from solidarity as Saint John Paul II said on December 30, 1987, *"The 'evil mechanisms' and 'structures of sin' can be overcome only through the exercise of the human and Christian solidarity to which the Church calls us and which she tirelessly promotes. Only in this way can such positive energies be fully released for the benefit of development and peace."*

With the assurance of my daily prayers for you and your ministries in America and beyond, I conclude my letter of gratitude to all of you and all the other American Bishops with the words of a traditional hymn (A Song of Peace): ***"May truth and freedom come to every nation; may peace abound where strife has raged so long; that each may seek to love and build together, a world united, righting every wrong; a world united in its love for freedom, proclaiming peace together in one song."***

Gratefully yours in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,
Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart,

motherOlga

mother servant of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth

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