



May 16, 2016

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

While attending the meeting of Dominican Sisters International (representing 171 Roman Catholic, Dominican Sisters Congregations in the world) in Rome from April 28 to May 5, 2016, we heard poignant testimony from two Iraqi Dominican Sisters who were displaced from their convents in Mosul and the Plain of Nineveh since August 2014. Since then they have been living and ministering to displaced Iraqi men, women and children in Kurdistan. In the words of our Sisters, “We share our peoples’ humiliation.”

They described a situation of overwhelming chaos; people uprooted with only what they were able to carry; people filled with anger, frustration and deep sadness. Our Sisters spend their days simply being with their people – listening, struggling to offer a sense of hope in the midst of seemingly endless violence and uncertainty. They have done their best to tend to the children – the most vulnerable, the ones who will carry the deep trauma of violence and displacement into the future.

As we listened to our Sisters speak of life in a part of our world in which displacement and senseless violence have become routine, we could not help but be filled with a sense of shame – remembering that it was our country which helped to unleash the present state of chaos with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. As bad as life might have been under Saddam Hussein, Christians and religious minorities were able to live together amicably, with a relative sense of peace. Our actions in 2003 helped to create a void which ISIS has easily filled, and the easy accessibility of weapons has emboldened ISIS to persecute, torture and kill with impunity.

Our Sisters said to us, “We don’t have the past – it was taken by ISIS; we don’t have a future – it is controlled by others; we only have the present.” It would seem that the United States is one of those who control the future of Iraq. What kind of future will it be?

In the name of our Iraqi Dominican Sisters, the suffering people of Iraq, and the Dominican Sisters Conference in the United States, we ask that the United States take more rigorous steps to stop the carnage which has been visited upon these helpless people as a consequence of our misguided foreign policy. We would suggest the following:

- a more proactive stance regarding illicit arms trade;
- an investment in the future of Iraq by bolstering much-needed infrastructure;
- a firm commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals/Agenda 2030, by a commitment to follow through on pledges of Official Development Assistance which would help to deal with

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some of the root causes of the present state of affairs, namely, poverty, hunger, violence against women, lack of education and employment opportunities.

Moreover, we call for increased International Assistance to NGO's in the U.S. budget in order to build the capacity of humanitarian organizations to respond to the ongoing crisis in Iraq. We request expedited resettlement and increased quotas for Iraqis awaiting migration to the United States

We are convinced that where there is a will, there is always a way.

Respectfully,

Sister Sharon Zayac, OP
President

Sister Patricia Farrell, OP
Executive Director

cc: Secretary of State John Kerry
Ambassador Samantha Power
House Speaker Paul Ryan
Senator Harry Reid

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