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Iraq Visit: Meeting With Civil Authorities

Pope Francis

As Iraq continues to “lay the foundations for a democratic society,” it must “ensure the participation of all political, social and religious groups and guarantee the fundamental rights of all citizens,” Pope Francis told government leaders as he began his four-day visit to Iraq March 5. Addressing Iraqi President Barham Salih, other government officials and diplomats serving in Iraq, gathered in the Hall of the Presidential Palace in Baghdad, the pope called on the nation to “grant all religious communities recognition, respect, rights and protection.” Making his first foreign trip in 15 months because of the COVID-19 pandemic, he encouraged a continued commit-

“I come as a penitent, asking forgiveness of heaven and my brothers and sisters for so much destruction and cruelty.”

ment to rebuilding the physical and social fabric of the country. “Following a crisis, it is not enough simply to rebuild; we need to rebuild well, so that all can enjoy a dignified life,” he said. “We never emerge from a crisis the same as we were; we emerge from it either better or worse.” Pope Francis said Iraqi Christians have “a rich heritage that they wish to continue to place at the service of all” and said their full participation in public life “can contribute to the nation’s prosperity and harmony.” He urged the international community to continue “constructive engagement” with Iraq, “without imposing political or ideological interests.” During his visit to Iraq, the pope celebrated Mass in Baghdad and Irbil, held an interreligious gathering, met with one of Shiite Islam’s top authorities and comforted beleaguered Christians in Mosul and Qaraqosh who have been victims of the Islamic State terrorist group. In his meeting with civil authorities, the pope spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of his address follows, copyright © 2021 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make this long-awaited and desired visit to the Republic of Iraq and to come to this land, a cradle of civilization closely linked through the patriarch Abraham and a number of the prophets to the history of salvation and to the great religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

I express my gratitude to His Excellency

continued on page 694

contents

- 693 Iraq Visit: Meeting With Civil Authorities
by Pope Francis
- 696 Iraq Visit: Meeting With Bishops, Priests, Religious, Seminarians and Catechists
by Pope Francis
- 698 Iraq Visit: Interreligious Gathering in Ur
by Pope Francis
- 701 Iraq Visit: Mass in Baghdad
by Pope Francis
- 702 Iraq Visit: Prayer for Victims of War in Mosul
by Pope Francis
- 704 Iraq Visit: Visit to Church in Qaraqosh That Was Desecrated by Islamic State Terrorists
by Pope Francis
- 705 Iraq Visit: Mass in Irbil
by Pope Francis
- 706 Pastoral Message Marking One Year of Pandemic
by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Administrative Committee
- 708 Datebook
- 708 On File

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