Message of His Holiness

**Mor Ignatius Aphrem II**

**Patriarch of Antioch and All the East**

**Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church**

Following the Meeting with Representatives of the Churches of Mosul

Patriarchal Residence, Atchaneh – Bikfaya – Lebanon, July 23, 2014

**Our people and beloved faithful in Iraq,**

**Our Displaced Children from Mosul,**

**Dear attendees,**

The incidents, that have been taking place since “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (ISIS) took control of a dear region of Iraq which is the cradle of humanity and the birthplace of our civilization, are considered barbarian and unprecedented acts in the history of the Christian Muslim relations in this region. ISIS systematically forced Christians and some Muslims out of the city of Mosul labeling them with racist signs and symbols, humiliating and luting them. Therefore, we strongly condemn these acts, and assert that this type of actions and this practice of Islam do not represent the Islam we have lived with for more than thirteen centuries.

This kind of Islam does not revere the religious texts nor the human relationships. Thus, we call upon our Muslim fellows and their leadership to take a clear stance against these actions and this phenomenon that contradicts the Qur’anic text. At the same time, we are astonished by the silence of most Muslim religious leaders and civil dignitaries regarding what has been happening in Mosul.

The forced displacement of our people, the taking over of our churches, the destruction of our sacred shrines, and the stealing of the properties and the future of our people will not prevent us from fulfilling our mission in this dear Levant. This injustice, which is against the heavenly and human laws, will not compel us to ask for Western protection or help. It is not out of fear or weakness, but because we believe that we are the salt of this land and the witnesses of the Resurrection till eternity. Nonetheless, we request that our compatriots be faithful to our common religious, cultural and human values and support and strengthen the Christian presence in this part of the world. Solidarity statements are not enough, they should stand against and stop supporting those who supply weapons and finance ISIS and similar organizations. Such fanatic acts will surely backfire on those who perpetuate them sooner or later.

Moreover, we declare that we are going to address the United Nations and the highest international and the Human Rights Fora to hold them accountable to the Bill of Rights they claim to support. We will ask them to abide by the Bill of Rights with no selectiveness or discrimination based on nationality or social identity.

We insist that what has been inflicted on our people in Mosul is a war crime. Forced displacements on the basis of religious belief, be it Islam or Christianity, is a crime against humanity and requires punishment. Despite what it is going through, we wish to see our beloved Iraq united and embracing all of its components and providing them with their rights. We demand that the Iraqi government protect the rights of the Christians to remain in their land and live with dignity. Moreover, we ask our Kurdish compatriots to work with us to protect the Christian presence in order to preserve the historical and cultural diversity in the region.

On the other hand, we say to our people in Mosul, Nineveh plain and Iraq in general: we will try our best, using all possible means, to provide you with the requisites to have a dignified life through our faithful children in the East and our international relations in an attempt to help you stay in the land of your fathers and forefathers. We will also appeal for the recuperation of your belongings and properties.

Finally, we are working to convene an urgent meeting soon with our brothers the Patriarchs of the East to discuss and take decisions concerning what has happened in Mosul and what is happening to the Christians of the East. We will form a Christian delegation from the East to carry this cause to the United Nations and to other international platforms as deemed necessary.

We thank Their Eminences and Excellencies the representatives of the Syrian Catholic Church, Chaldean Church and Assyrian Church of the East along with the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches and the Ambassador of Iraq in Lebanon for accepting our invitation and for their presence here to consult with us and to work together for the common interest of our suffering people in Mosul.

Thank you,

We also thank the press and journalists who responded positively to our invitation.