Statement
from the Nordic Bishops’ Conference
on the conflict in Iraq and Syria

The whole world is witnessing the suffering of the people in Iraq and Syria because of terror, persecution and war. In Syria alone, more than 160,000 people have been killed; 2 million have left the country and 6 million are displaced. Not only is human dignity as such threatened, minorities are systematically killed, persecuted and humiliated.

Many of the refugees and displaced people are Christians, our brothers and sisters, who are facing an exodus from the Middle East as the only hope to survive. This severe crisis is very much Pope Francis’s concern. He is constantly calling for an end to the fighting and slaughtering of innocent human beings. He has highlighted the assistance Caritas has given to refugees and IDPs (internally displaced person) regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation as the best way to contribute towards peace.

We, the Catholic Bishops of the Nordic countries meeting in Turku, Finland, support the statement of Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako given on 10 September 2014 in Brussels: “The fundamental rights have to be respected. One should be able to practice one’s religion in peace in Iraq. I appeal to the High Representatives of Foreign Affairs to provide quickly the necessary help.”

We also call upon the Nordic governments generously to support the United Nations and the humanitarian organisations working in the Middle East. The Nordic countries can afford to do so.

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We, the bishops, also call upon the governments and people in the Nordic countries to be generous so that the people can stay in their own countries in safety, and in the present situation to welcome refugees. We strongly appeal to the Governments of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Finland to cancel decisions to return refugees from Iraq and Syria in danger of their lives, and that these are granted permanent asylum.

We, the bishops also call upon all Catholics in Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland to support the efforts of the Caritas-network to assist people in desperate need in the Middle East, and with the faithful we continue to pray for peace in this region.

Turku, 15 September 2014.

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