Iraq Letter 6
August 4, 2014

Dear Sisters, Brothers, and Friends,

Thank you for journeying with us through prayers and support in the past few months. It really is a time of peril and we are hoping that a miracle from God will end all that.

So far, 510 families have been displaced from Mosul. Some were fortunate to leave before the deadline ISIS set as they were able to take their belongings with them. However, 160 families of them left Mosul with only their clothes on; everything they had was taken away from them.

These families are in so much need of help and support. People in Christian towns that received these refugees opened their homes to provide shelters and food for them, as much as they could. People are strongly willing to help, but the fact that they did not have their salaries for two months (June-July) makes it extremely difficult for them to offer more. As the salaries of government employees in areas under ISIS control are being suspended. Additionally, because of the present situation in Mosul and the whole province (of Nineveh) the economy of the state is suffering, which naturally affects everyone. Since the tension started in Mosul, many people lost their jobs as 99% of jobs stopped, which means there is hardly any money to be used let alone loaning to those who are in need. This is not only in the province of Nineveh, but also in Erbil. Moreover, all Christians in the plain of Nineveh have not received their food supplement, which the government used to provide via the smart ration card. This is causing a crisis not only for the refugees, but also for the residents in the area.

However, the church is calling people to open their homes for refugees as there are some families staying in Church’s halls with limited space and public services in Nineveh plain. But in Karakosh, residents and churches are collaborating. Residents are welcoming refugees in their homes and churches are providing for them; therefore, refugees prefer to come to Karakosh. Additionally, the church, with the help of Christian endowment, is planning to provide caravans as kind of accommodations for the time being. This project, however, seems to take longer time than expected.

As you perhaps know, concerning the situation in Mosul, the Islamic State has a policy in governing the city. After displacing the Christians, they started their policy concerning the holy places that angered people. So far, the churches are under their control; crosses have been taken off. But we are not sure about the extent of the damaged done in them. In addition to that, few mosques have been affected, too. The ISIS destroyed two mosques with their shrines last week: the mosque of Prophet Sheeth (Seth) and the mosque of the Prophet Younis, or Jonah, said to be the burial place of Jonah. The militants claim that such mosques have become places for apostasy, not prayer. This was really too painful for all people as Jonah’s shrine was considered as a monument. Also, it was a historical place as it was built on an old church. Destroying such places is a destruction of our heritage and legacy.

Besides, ISIS is setting some rules that even Mosul residents cannot tolerate. Like forcing young people to join them, preventing women to go out, and enforcing the strict interpretation of Islamic law.

People in towns around Mosul are afraid that ISIS would extend their control after the Muslim Feast holidays. This period of Muslim feast was a kind of intermission, but no one knows what to expect next. In fact, they have already started. The ISIS are extending their controlled zone. Yesterday (Aug 3) there
were encounters between ISIS and Pashmerga outside of Mosul to the north. Meanwhile, the central
government is attacking the ISIS in Mosul. Most of Christians in towns of Batnaya and Telkaif have left
their homes because they are very close to Mosul. The situation in Karkush is in the present time is calm.
But this causes fear and horror among Christians and that’s why some families from Karkush are leaving
to Kurdistan, some have plans to leave the country, and some are staying. This in any case weakens
Christians feeling of belonging to the country.

We are surprised that some countries of the world are silent about what is happening. We hoped that
there would be stronger international approach toward Iraq, and Christians in Iraq in general.

As for us as community, our sisters in Batnaya and Telkaif had to leave the town with 99% of people who
left because of violence outside the town.

We have had our annual retreat on the 20th of July. That gave us opportunity to pray for Iraq and our
Christian community during this time of peril.

Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena –Iraq