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REBUILDING PEACE IN CHARITY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ

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When I was invited to talk about rebuilding peace, I was overjoyed because I will be talking about a living experience in Iraq as well as in Caritas Iraq for more than two decades of time.

I will take advantage of time allotted and talk about the subject through three main axes:

First: Peace

Second: peace building through loving

Third: the contribution of the Christians in Iraq

First: Peace

No one knows the value of peace except when he loses it. It is very difficult to live life normally with no peace which is an internal feeling stemming from the depth of heart, a feeling of security and stability. If you want to build peace, you have to build it inside you first and then work with others using all peaceful ways especially loving. In order to reach to the community peace, you have to take into consideration respecting others, listening to them and sharing our thoughts. Peace needs courage and openness.

Second: Building peace through loving

Man in nature is social and emotional, if you want to build peace you have to take the initiative because initiative is important. You have to give which should be stemming from faith.

Some examples:

- Caritas Iraq was the first to contribute in rebuilding people and cities which were taken over by ISIS which were liberated afterwards (Caritas was the first to get into these cities). Our initiation was based on loving, building a relation with the affected ones, a relation based on giving and communication and not on the basis of providing tangible material aids only. The impact was great. Affected people started preferring receiving aids from Caritas more than the other parties, despite the fact that the other parties had a more material support.
- We participated in providing activities such as caring for the children, instructing the patients, assisting mothers and women, mitigating the psychological suffering and found a drastic shift in their behavior.

We also found that affected people in the areas of our work, gradually return to their normal conditions more than in the other areas. Loving works like magic. We came out with this that if you want to change a man's life to the better, you have to make an initiation of loving. If you want to build peace, you have to start with small things, and from there change will take place. You have to motivate emotions and human feelings of the others; you have to address their humanity. Upbringing is very important and as you know that upbringing is the art of building human beings to be normal, playing a positive role in his/her family first and then in his/her community, work...etc.

Third: The contribution of the Christians in Iraq

The Christians are the aboriginal people of Iraq with roots extending back to the first century BC. They were the majority until Islam came to Iraq in the sixth century BC. The Christians contributed in building the great civilization of this country in culture, economy and social terms. They are still playing a basic role in rebuilding it despite their decreasing in numbers. Despite the fact of their decreasing numbers lately, from 1.5 million in to 500.000 only in a country with a population of 40 million people, the Christians play a great role. Caritas alone, an organization affiliated with the Catholic church in Iraq, assisted more than 500.000 families during the past seven years. The role of the Christians was giving a testimony to others; our existence holds a message. Our message is that we are here in our country despite of being targeted. Even when we used to go to some areas where people know nothing about Christianity, its only now that they realize that the Christians love others and ready to help. They started to know who the Christians are and what Christianity is. Our work then is a live testimony. We participated in building our country and headed towards the others and assisted them. Our contributions were of two types:

- *Tangible*: the in-kind and social assistance and others
- *Non-tangible* which is according to me is the most important

We contributed in changing attitudes such as accepting the others, openness, cooperating with others, sharing others their concerns, changing the way of thinking, staying away from some harmful customs and traditions. Such as:

- Equality between men and women
- The importance of sending children to school especially girls
- Taking care of people with special needs and void neglecting them

I think we have tacitly contributed to changing society and the positive results will appear in the future. The existence of the Christians in Iraq represents diversity and integration. Here, I must refer to the visit of the Holy See which is a testimony of the role of the Christians in Iraq. The Iraqis in general welcomed his visit and celebrated this visit as a national occasion. We as Christians were able to say in a loud voice that we are here, we love our country and want to work with the others to rebuild it; if we were to make a choice from the heaven in the world and the cross of Iraq, we will choose the cross of Iraq.

Finally, I ask you to pray for the Christians in Iraq to hey fulfill their mission and remain like yeast. We are few in numbers but our actions are great.