

# **iraqi\_freedom\_51903**

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## **Iraqi Christians appeal for religious freedom**

VATICAN CITY (RNS)—Iraq's Christian patriarchs and bishops have appealed for full religious, social and political freedom for the Christian descendants of the prophet Abraham in Iraq's new regime.

The Vatican issued the text of a joint statement made in Baghdad by leaders of the Chaldean, Assyrian, Syrian, Armenian, Greek and Latin rite churches in Iraq, where Muslims make up 90 percent of the population of 23 million.

The leaders said they hoped that “all the Iraqi people, who have known a long history marked by conflicts and successes, may live without distinction of religion or race in liberty, justice and respect in inter-religious and multiethnic coexistence.”

Emphasizing Iraq's ancient culture, the leaders referred to the code that Hammurabi, king of Babylon, etched in stone, making law “the basis of the development of civilization,” and to Abraham of Ur, who became “the father of a multitude of peoples.”

It was in Iraq, they said, that Christianity and Islam met in “a respectful reciprocal coexistence.”

“By virtue of our origins as part of the most ancient people of this Earth, we demand for us and for all those who today inhabit it—constituting a majority or minority, united by a long history of coexistence—to live as full

members in a state of law in peace, liberty, justice and equality according to the Charter of the Rights of Man,” the leaders said.

Iraq's new constitution must recognize Christians' “religious, cultural, social and political rights,” allow all citizens to take part in government, give Christians full citizenship and guarantee them full religious rights, the statement said.

The leaders said they wanted specific guarantees of “the right to profess our faith according to our ancient traditions and our religious norms, the right to educate our children according to Christian principles, and the right to organize freely, to build places of worship and, when necessary, other spaces for cultural and social activities.”

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