



## **ASIA/IRAQ - Increased security measures, especially for religious and ethnic communities**

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - The Christians of Mosul are increasingly targeted by armed men that, as reported by the press in Iraq, killed at least five people in the month of November. News of kidnappings and murders of Christians in Mosul has continued to arrive even in December. Dozens of Christian families have fled Baghdad, Mosul and Basra, and found refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan. There are several testimonies from Iraqi Christians who recently fled to Syria, who make note of a Christian organization, the Church Committee for Iraqi Refugees in al-Hassaké. In the document published by the Barnabas Fund, another Christian NGO, it states that the Christians from cities such as Mosul “live locked up at home.” They are forced to take long periods of absence from work due to the risks they face, both in Mosul and other cities. Universities and schools are almost totally devoid of Christian students. As reported by the press, in view of Christmas, the Iraqi authorities have begun to build concrete walls to protect churches in Baghdad and Mosul and strict controls have been introduced at the entrance. Religious services were cut back for fear of attacks.

“Building walls around the churches is a sign that the Government has failed to provide real security,” says Malcolm Smart, director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International. The wave of attacks against Christians in Mosul since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 has considerably reduced the population of the community, which then numbered more than 100,000 people. Between mid-2004 and the end of 2009, there have been about 65 attacks on Christian churches in Iraq. “We strongly condemn these attacks against Iraqi civilians and we call on the Government to increase protective measures, particularly for vulnerable, religious and ethnic communities,” says the appeal by Amnesty International sent to Fides. The attacks have increased since 31 October, 2010, when an armed group took 100 people hostage in a Syrian Catholic Church, killing 40 while the security forces tried to free them. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 21/12/2010)