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ASIA/IRAQ - Bombs in Kirkuk during Cardinal Sandri's Mass

Kirkuk (Agenzia Fides) - Terrorist attacks struck yesterday, Sunday, December 16, the city of Kirkuk, causing nine deaths (including 2 children) and more than fifty injuries. Two coordinated attacks – carried out with two car bombs and seven bombs placed on the sides of the roads - targeted two Shiite mosques on the outskirts of the city. But the explosions were felt distinctly even in the Chaldean Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, during the celebration of the Mass presided by Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, causing anxiety among many worshipers.
With the sequence of bloody events going on in the disputed territories between the government in Baghdad and the autonomous administration of Iraqi Kurdistan - new attacks in the region caused even today the death of at least 11 people. Yesterday, before the solemn celebration of Mass in the Chaldean, Arabic and English language (which was also attended by Archbishop Louis Sako and the Apostolic Nuncio Giorgio Lingua) Cardinal Sandri had visited the largest Sunni mosque in Kirkuk, meeting a qualified delegation of islamic representatives. The imam of the mosque, Ahmad Amin, had received the Cardinal inviting him to convey his feelings of esteem and respect to the "Holy Father", and praised the initiatives of collaboration and dialogue locally inspired by Archbishop Sako. Similar concepts were also expressed by Shaykh Shi'ite Abbas Fadhil, and by the other leader of the local Sunni community, Ali Iman. Responding to reporters after Mass, Cardinal Sandri had reaffirmed the importance of protecting the permanence of indigenous Christian communities in Iraq, noting that without the Christians that Country would lose its historical identity.
This morning, Cardinal Sandri visited the governor of Kirkuk, the Kurdish Necmettin Karim, who greeted him with respect, condemning the attacks as a result of a strategy of terror designed and built by external power to sabotage the tradition of peaceful coexistence that characterized the relations between the different ethnic and religious groups in the region. Then the Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Oriental Churches moved to Erbil, where he will meet with Mas'ud Barzani, president of the autonomous region of Kurdistan.
"Cardinal Sandri's visit," confides to Fides Agency Archbishop of Kirkuk Louis Sako "was an important time for all of us. After nine years an official representative of the Holy See visited Iraq. Thanks to Cardinal Sandri's visit we also perceived the affection and concern of Pope Benedict XVI for us Christians in Iraq and for all Iraqis."
(GV) (Agenzia Fides 17/12/2012).

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