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ASIA/IRAQ - Clashes between Kurds and Islamists, Christians fleeing Qaraqosh

Qaraqosh (Agenzia Fides) - On Wednesday June 25, Sunni militiamen led by the jihadists of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIL) attacked the city of Qaraqosh, situated in the Nineveh Plain, 28 kilometers from Mosul. The center, mainly inhabited by Chaldean Christians and Syrians, is guarded by the Kurdish Peshmerga militia, who for the moment have rejected the offensive of Sunni insurgents, thanks to the intervention of contingent reinforcement from Iraqi Kurdistan. Local sources consulted by Fides Agency confirm that the clashes have caused many deaths on both sides, and that since Wednesday evening, the civilian population has begun to flee en masse from Qaraqosh and other predominantly Christian villages in the Nineveh Plain, heading towards Erbil and safer areas of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Only on Thursday morning, June 26 at least 200 Christian families fled from Qaraqosh with the intention of reaching Ankawa, in the suburbs of Erbil. It is also in Ankawa that the Bishops of the Chaldean Church in these days have gathered for their annual synod. Images relaunched by www.ankawa.com website show queues of cars with displaced peoples from the Nineveh Plain that are blocked on the outskirts of Erbil for controls. Qaraqosh, also known with the name of Bakhdida, is a town of about 50 thousand inhabitants, and more than 90 per cent belong to the Syrian Catholic Church. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 26/06/2014)

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