In spiritual communion with Iraqi Christians assisted by the Order in Jordan

At the Holy Father's express invitation, our Grand Master, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, took part in the historic voyage of Pope Francis to Iraq. Our prayers in particular have joined those of the Iraqi refugees in Jordan who have been assisted by the Order for several years and shared in the joy of their compatriots in those days which were of great hope.

Iraqi Christians have been present in Jordan for many years. "As a result of the continuous violence and insecurity in Iraq and after the military intervention in 2003, large numbers of Iraqis have been displaced from Iraq to neighbouring countries including the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which hosts some hundreds of thousands of Iraqis since 2003" says deacon Jubran Salameh, administrative vice director of the Latin Patriarchate in Jordan. Since 2014, the advance of armed groups and ISIS violence have forced even more people, especially minorities, to flee Iraq in an attempt to save their lives.

"Since the arrival of Iraqi Christians in Jordan in 2014, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been committed to making their daily lives better. Thanks to the generosity of the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, of Caritas Jordan and of the Holy See, aid has been forthcoming in various fields, allowing them the opportunity to continue to practice their faith," wrote the Communications Office of the Latin Patriarchate in 2019, reporting on the work carried out in recent years to support these refugee families.

On a legal level - explains deacon Jubran Salameh - Iraqis are considered guests, which means that they are respected but that they live in a "gray area". Although there is a growing sensitivity to human rights and the situations that refugees find themselves living in, "with no legal status or

defined access to livelihoods, coupled with the spiralling and precarious economic situation of the country, large numbers of Iraqis are finding themselves in dire straits.”

The donations made by the Order in recent years have funded a series of projects in support of Iraqi Christian refugees, in particular aid to cover rent, job creation, medical assistance and educational programmes. In 2019-2020 the Order contributed over $ 430,000 to these initiatives.

The story of every refugee in need of support is similar and clearly unique at the same time. Busrha lived in Nineveh with her family. When Isis invaded her village, women and children fled and walked for 16 hours, carrying only their passports to escape. Arriving in Erbil for a year they hoped to be able to return to their homes but this dream never came true. Now Busrha lives with other Iraqi families in Hashimi and thanks the Knights and Dames of the Order for their support and love.

Remon fled Iraq with his mother and father. He has been in Jordan for six years and for four years has been in the Patriarchate’s’ Our Lady of Peace Centre that welcomes various refugee families. "Thanks to the help and support we receive from the Knights and Dames of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre - shares Remon - we can have dignity and meet our main needs."

Upon their arrival in Jordan, Christian refugees lived in caravans or in parish halls, in shared spaces and without privacy. Over the years the Patriarchate has developed a plan that has allowed them to be moved into apartments. Attention to the economic needs of these families is not just meant to be assistance and, when possible, jobs have been created for a few dozen refugees in the structures of the Patriarchate so that they themselves could contribute to the sustenance of their families. As for the children, the Patriarchate “provides educational and scholarship support to the Iraqi children and youth living in Jordan through paying tuition fees and providing capacity building courses such as languages, math, religious education, Microsoft Office trainings and more. In addition, we have now 2 separate schools for Christians Iraqi refugees served around 500 students, one in Hashimi and the other school in Marka” says the deputy administrative director of the Patriarchate in Jordan.

Thus, during the visit of the Holy Father to Iraq, Iraqi Christians who no longer live on their own land were certainly looking forward to this moment and are grateful for the interest that the Universal Church shows in them. We joined in their prayers by accompanying Pope Francis' journey and asking for the gift of peace.

Some refugees have rediscovered the dignity of work in a mosaic laboratory supported by the Order in Jordan.

The path of Iraqi Christian refugees arriving in Jordan was often a long one. Moved on so many times, so many attempts to start over, such great effort to readjust and so many hopes often dashed. Below we share the story of Sanna, who today, thanks to the constant commitment of the Latin Patriarchate and the contributions sent by the Order, has found a space in which to feel supported and accompanied.

I am Sanna, we were evacuated from our house, me and my family made of 5 members, from Mosul to Qaraqosh due to the terrorist acts and we stayed there till the year 2014, then on the 6th of August we started our Journey leaving Qaraqosh behind as well due to Daesh attacks (ISIS).

We left everything and we escaped to Erbil that was 85 Km far from Qaraqosh, which took us around 8 hours to reach there. After reaching Erbil we went to St. Josef church for Chaldeans and we stayed there for few days until we found a joint living with two families till June 2016 and after that we went to Ashti compound for refugees till the year 2017. Then we decided to leave the country as ISIS destroyed and burned our house and my children couldn't go to school. Then we went to Amman, and I worked at Our Lady of Peace Centre, this centre sheltered me and my family for years, without feeling that we are far away from our home, and provided us with all our needs (both emotional and financial).