



ZE12042707 - 2012-04-27

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-34686?l=english>

Kirkuk Archbishop Leads Peace Initiative

Muslims, Tribal Leaders Join Prelate in Signing Document

KIRKUK, Iraq, APRIL 27, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Kirkuk has spearheaded an interreligious initiative to promote peace.

With some 50 representatives of Sunni Islam, Arab tribal leaders and local government officials, he signed a document "Let us build bridges of peace," released Thursday, as reported by Aid to the Church in Need.

The signatories pledge to live together in peace in Kirkuk, which is an object of contention between Kurds and the central government in Baghdad. In a meeting with Aid to the Church in Need, Archbishop Sako explained his most recent action to promote ongoing dialogue by saying, "We Christians have a mission of peace and reconciliation that extends to all people, not just Christians."

ACN explained that in the petroleum-rich city of Kirkuk, Kurds make up a slight majority of the population. A referendum on whether to transfer this city to the Autonomous Kurdistan region or leave it under the central government in Baghdad was originally slated for 2007, but has been continually postponed since then.

The signatories of the dialogue paper condemn all forms of violence: "Violence will not change or improve the situation; rather, it will drown our city in a sea of injustice, social disadvantages and underdevelopment."

The archbishop estimates the numbers of Chaldeans to be at around 10,000-12,000, or 4% of Kirkuk's population. Because they are such a small minority, and with little political weight, the archbishop is considered a mediator and a neutral figure in the debate.

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