

Midnight Masses canceled in Iraq because of growing security concerns

LONDON - Chaldean Catholic officials have canceled traditional Christmas Eve midnight Masses because of security risks.

Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk in northern Iraq told the agency Aid to the Church in Need that Christians will spend Christmas in “great fear” because of the risk of new attacks.

All services and Masses have been scheduled for daylight hours, he said in an interview with Rome-based AsiaNews.

“Midnight Christmas Mass has been canceled in Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk as a consequence of the never-ending assassinations of Christians,” he said, citing the Oct. 31, 2010, attack on the Syrian Catholic cathedral that left 57 people dead in the Iraqi capital.

Archbishop Sako also expressed concern over the growing conflict between Sunni and Shiite Muslims vying for political power. He said the conflict has led to growing instability, especially in the days since the pullout of U.S. military troops in mid-December.

The archbishop’s concerns follow a series of incidents in the northern province of Kurdistan, which had been considered safe haven for Christians.

In Erbil, Kurdistan’s capital, Christian Sermat Patros, 29 was kidnapped Dec. 12. Between Dec. 2 and Dec. 5, at least 30 Christian-owned businesses were torched in Zakho near the Turkish border. A Christian couple also was found shot dead in their car Dec. 13 in Mosul.

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