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**DICHIARAZIONE DEL PRESIDENTE DEL PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO "COR UNUM" A
CONCLUSIONE DELLA VISITA IN IRAQ (28 MAGGIO-3 GIUGNO 2003)**

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VISITA IN IRAQ (28 MAGGIO-3 GIUGNO 2003)

A conclusione della sua visita in Iraq, il Presidente del Pontificio Consiglio "Cor Unum", S.E. Mons. Paul Josef Cordes, ha rilasciato ai giornalisti la seguente dichiarazione:

In these months, the Holy Father has repeatedly expressed his concern for the events that are occurring in Iraq. Before the war, He has sent as His special envoy Cardinal Etchegaray, to search for a negotiable solution for the imminent conflict and to safeguard thus peace.

On continuation of that visit, He has asked me to be as interpreter, after the wartime events, of His spiritual closeness to those who have gone through sorrowful consequences of the war in these past months. My visit has begun on 28-th of last May. Together with the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Filoni, I have celebrated the Eucharist in three occasions with the Catholics of this country : on 29-th May in Baghdad, on 31-st in Mossul in the Chaldean rite and on 1-st June in the Syrian Catholic rite, Therefore, I could address myself to the Christian Community, present each time in overwhelming number, confirming the paternal union and encouragement of the Holy Father. During my visit, numerous meetings were held and particularly the two reunions with more than ten bishops: with them I have reflected specially on the significance of the charitable commitment in the ecclesial mission. Moreover, I have met both with various Bishops of other Christian confessions in Baghdad and in Mossul, and also with the civil authority; the Director General of the Unites Nations Development Program (UNDP) Mr. Francis Dubois, the Mayor of Mossul and some diplomatic Representatives. Besides, I had the chance of visiting some religious congregations and the respective charitable institutions, which they administer, among which St Raphael's Hospital, the Home of the Sisters of Mother Theresa and the Institution for young girls in Mossul. Every one has expressed gratitude to the Holy Father for His tireless commitment for the people of Iraq and for peace. Having experienced a great spirit of communion and collaboration among Christians in Iraq, I have assured them that I will refer these sentiments of profound recognition to His Holiness.

In accordance with the given mandate and the task of our Vatican Department (the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum"), I could verify personally the necessities of the country in view of a plan of aids in which will involve the

Catholic humanitarian organizations. They have already located some sectors of intervention such as emergency aids in alimentation, housing, sanitary, and education. Many Catholic aid agencies are intending to take charge, together with other institutions, of these necessities.

As per the "Declaration of the Patriarchs and the Bishops in Iraq" of 29-th April 2003, I wish to confirm the contribution that the Catholic Church could give for a future in which religious, cultural, social and political rights of all are acknowledged, and in which particularly one guarantees to the Christians the right to profess freely their own faith.

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