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7 Killed in Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad

Hostages Taken During Sunday Liturgy

BAGHDAD, Iraq, OCT. 31, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- A hostage situation in the Sayidat al-Najat Syrian Catholic cathedral of Baghdad today ended when Iraqi police stormed the church. At least seven are dead, and another 20 are wounded.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office, affirmed that the Holy See was following closely the situation that began today when gunmen entered the church during the Sunday liturgy and took the congregation as hostages.

Syrian Catholic Archbishop Georges Casmoussa of Mosul reported in a phone call to the Sant'Egidio Community, "In the afternoon armed men entered the Syrian Catholic cathedral of Baghdad during the Eucharistic Celebration, killing two people, after having driven a car through the entrance of the basilica."

The priest moved the congregation, consisting of about 50 people, into a back room. At one point, a gunman threw an explosive into the room, which caused some of the casualties.

The prelate said, "They claimed that to belong to the organization 'The Islamic State of Iraq' and asked that prisoners of their organization detained in Iraq and Egypt be freed."

In a brief interview with the blog "Baghdadhope" Auxiliary Bishop Shelmon Warduni of the Patriarchate of Babylon of the Chaldeans, stated: "I know that there are victims among the outside guards of the church and that a little girl was killed."

Some of the hostages were able to escape as Iraqi and American soldiers surrounded the church. The troops eventually stormed the church and arrested eight gunmen. In their wake, at least seven dead were counted and 20 wounded.

"It is a big massacre, an unjust and unconscionable thing," Bishop Warduni said. "We pray that God enlighten the minds and the hearts of the terrorists who should think of the good of the people, of their own families and not follow these ways that are not the ways of God but those of the demon."

The Syrian Catholic cathedral of Baghdad, named for Our Lady of Salvation, had already been a target on August 1, 2004 in another attack that left at least 12 dead.

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