Statement of the Director of the Press Office on behalf of the Holy Father

(7 August 2014)

The Holy Father is following with deep concern the dramatic news reports coming from northern Iraq, which involve defenseless populations. Christian communities are particularly affected: a people fleeing from their villages because of the violence that rages in these days, wreaking havoc on the entire region.

At the Angelus prayer on July 20th, Pope Francis cried with pain: *"[O]ur brothers and sisters are persecuted, they are pushed out, forced to leave their homes without the opportunity to take anything with them. To these families and to these people I would like to express my closeness and my steadfast prayer. Dearest brothers and sisters so persecuted, I know how much you suffer, I know that you are deprived of everything. I am with you in your faith in Him who conquered evil!"*

In light of these terrible developments, the Holy Father renews his spiritual closeness to all those who are suffering through this painful trial, and makes the impassioned appeals of the local bishops his own, asking together with them in behalf of their sorely tried communities, that the whole Church and all the faithful raise up with one voice a ceaseless prayer, imploring the Holy Spirit to send the gift of peace.

His Holiness urgently calls on the international community to protect all those affected or threatened by the violence, and to guarantee all necessary assistance – especially the most urgently needed aid – to the great multitude of people who have been driven from their homes, whose fate depends entirely on the solidarity of others.

The Pope also appeals to the conscience of all people, and to each and every believer he repeats: *"May the God of peace create in all an authentic desire for dialogue and reconciliation. Violence is not conquered with violence. Violence is conquered with peace! Let us pray in silence, asking for peace; everyone, in silence.... Mary Queen of peace, pray for us!"* (*Angelus*, July 20, 2014).