

Speech held by Avak Asadourian, Archbishop, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of Iraq, and General Secretary, Council of Christian Church Leaders in Baghdad, at the opening ceremony of the Church of Sweden general assembly September 2007.

*Your Majesties, The King and Queen of Sweden  
Your Graces Archbishops and Bishops  
Rev. Clergy Persons  
Honorable Members of the General Assembly of the Church of Sweden*

*My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

*At first and almost, I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*Our delegation from Baghdad is indeed honored to participate in this auspicious occasion in the presence of Their Majesties, the King and Queen of Sweden, as well as all the clergy persons and faithful present here. We are thankful to the Church of Sweden and to the Christian Council of Sweden who afforded us, as members of the Council of Christian Church-Leaders in Baghdad, this opportunity to be amongst all of you who are gathered here in the spirit of fellowship.*

*We come from a troubled region known as the Middle East where the three monotheistic and Abrahamic religions had their start. We also come from a wounded country known as Iraq. In olden times it was called Mesopotamia, the land between two biblical rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. I recall this fact to make us aware that our country, besides being a biblical land, it is also a land where Christianity was proclaimed from apostolic times especially through the efforts of St. Thomas the Apostle and his disciples.*

*Our delegation is comprised of six high ranking clergymen representing four Christian families:- the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Eastern and the Protestant Churches. The Christian Community in Iraq is comprised of 14 denominations. Some of us pray and conduct services in the very language of Jesus Christ, each Church maintaining her own rich tradition, administered by her own hierarchy, worshiping Almighty God through her own rites and ceremonies which, throughout 20 centuries have been gradually refined so as to present to our faithful the salvific message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*Our delegation present here represents all the Christian Churches of Iraq. We are here to witness to the fact that, throughout 2000 years of constituting the Body of Christ, this determination necessitated constant self sacrifice. Within this time span many millions of our faithful have become martyrs in the cause of our faith. Indeed, as we understand our task and charge, Christianity is a mission worth living for and, when need be, worth dying for. And we have done both with fortitude and unwavering commitment to our Churches.*

*As our forefathers have done in the past, your brothers and sisters in the faith, are steadfast in their belief regardless of the difficulties we face everyday especially after April 2003. We practice our Christian convictions in its eastern manifestation, and we ask you to participate in the God-pleasing work for the perseveration of our Churches and peoples in our part of the world. Much will be lost for Christianity if our Churches in the Middle East cease to function properly or become a relic of the past.*

*We are here amongst you in Sweden to share with you our ecumenical experiences in the firm understanding that we ought to rely on what unites us, which is the love of Jesus, rather than emphasizing our differences that are part and parcel of man's human facticity. We believe that every Christian tradition is but a flower in the vase of Christianity having its own color and aroma and that the sum-total of the flowers constitute the Christian Garden of Eden in the world.*

*In one of His dialogues our Lord assured us that when two or three people are gathered in His name then He is amongst them (Mt. 18:20). And with so many Christian people gathered at this very moment in the name of Jesus Christ, then indeed He is among us and will, in His own good time, turn our trials into victories for the greater glory of God. Truly, when God is with us who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31).*

*In conclusion, allow me to bring to all of you greetings of the people of God from our wounded country in the hope that, at the end of the dark tunnel through which all the Iraqi people are still traversing, there will indeed be light, the light that will be lit by people of good will in Iraq be they Muslims, Christians and other followers of different faiths.*

*May "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all" (2 Cor. 13:14). Amen.*