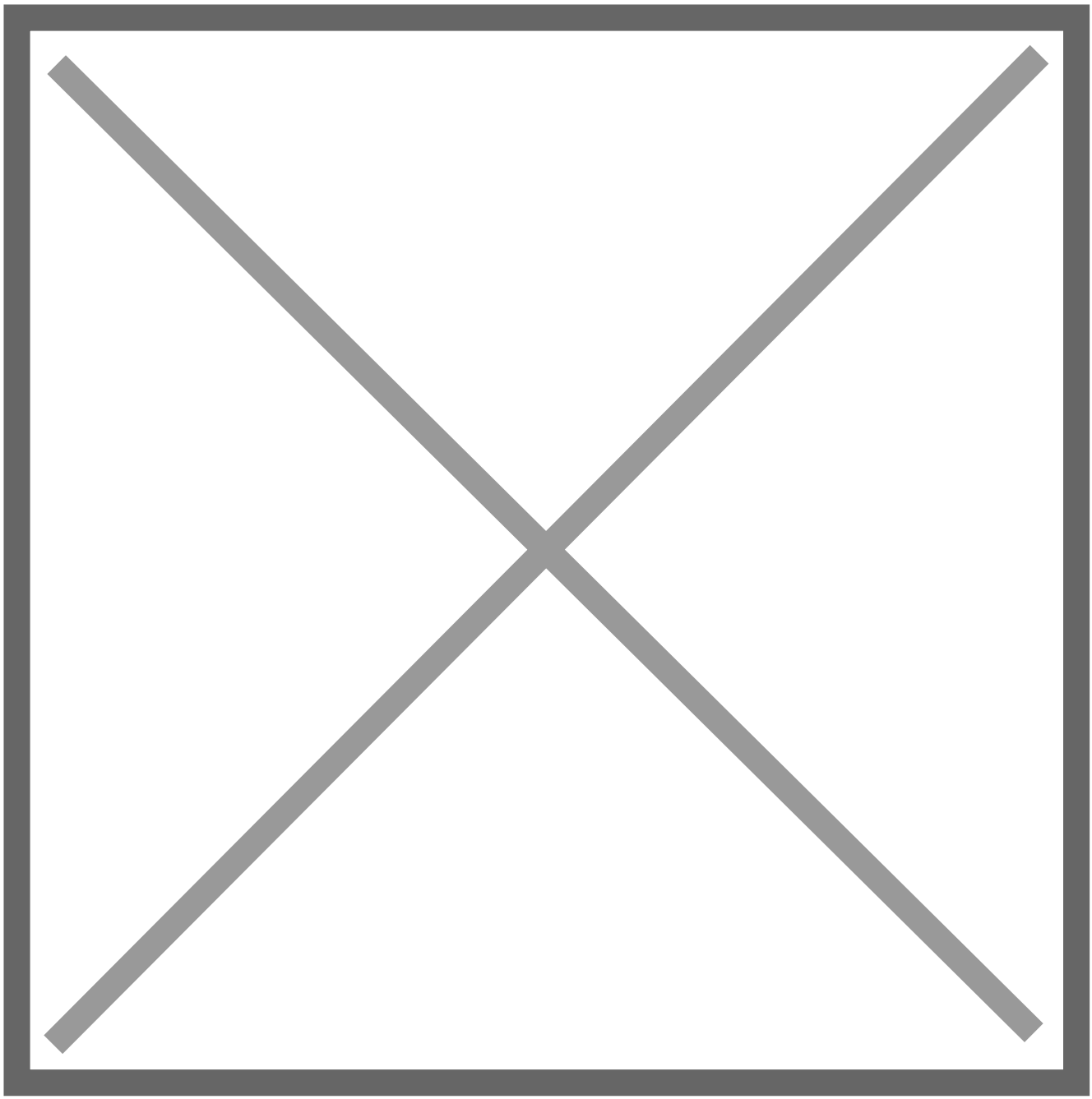
News



Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil, Iraq, is seen during his visit to the U.S. offices of Aid to the Church in Need in Brooklyn, N.Y., July 18, 2022. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

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Irbil, Iraq — June 24, 2025

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A Chaldean archbishop told OSV News June 23 that he has been unable to contact his fellow bishop in Iran, following recent strikes by the U.S. and Israel on various sites in that nation.

Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Irbil, Iraq, said he has been attempting to call fellow Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Imad Khoshabeh of Tehran over the past few days, but without success.

"I cannot reach (him). I tried many times, and I will keep calling," said Warda.

He also warned of the grave consequences of conflict, speaking from direct experience.

In 2014, Islamic State group fighters launched a devastating wave of attacks against religious minorities in northern Iraq, seizing Mosul and the surrounding Nineveh Plains. Christians and Yazidis, an ancient Indigenous community, fled toward Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, with thousands of Yazidi women and girls who were sexually enslaved by IS militants.

Now, as Israel and Iran trade strikes amid the former's "Operation Rising Lion" — and with the U.S. launching June 21 attacks on three of Iran's nuclear facilities — Warda pleaded for an end to the escalating violence.

"As someone who has witnessed firsthand the devastation that war leaves behind — how it empties villages, scatters families, and deepens the wounds of identity and

trust — I cannot help but echo the words of Pope Leo XIV in his recent appeal for peace," Warda said. "His voice is a beacon of conscience in a world increasingly deafened by the noise of weapons."

The archbishop added, "War has never brought us lasting peace.

"We know this by heart. Here in Iraq, we carry the memory of shattered cities and displaced people," he said. "Each new conflict reopens old wounds and threatens to erase what remains of our fragile presence (as a Christian minority) in this land."

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Instead, said Warda, "It is time to stop the war machine. Time to return to dialogue, to diplomacy, to the hard but hopeful work of negotiation."

The Middle East, ravaged by conflict for centuries — with continuous clashes over the past half century in particular — "does not need more destruction," said Warda. "It needs healing. It needs space for its people to breathe again, to believe again, to build again."

He clarified that he was speaking "not just as a bishop, but as a man from this wounded land (of Iraq)," which although an overwhelmingly Muslim majority nation has been home to Christian communities for some 2,000 years, having been evangelized by St. Thomas the Apostle and his disciples.

Iraq was "a land where Christians once thrived, where faith and culture were deeply woven into the soil," said Ward. "Today, that soil is dry and cracked, not only by the heat of the sun, but by the fire of violence and fear."

"Our prayers are with — and for — all civilians caught in the crossfire of this conflict … the innocent who fall daily, dead or wounded … the displaced who have been forced to leave behind their homes, their dreams, their loved ones," he said. "As Christians, we do not pray only for our own, but for every human being whose dignity is being crushed under the weight of war."

He cautioned that "if the world does not act now, if the international community does not insist on peace, the slow disappearance of Christianity from its birthplace may become irreversible."

At the same time, said Warda, "We are not without hope. Hope is what we teach our young people here every day. Hope is what gives our families the courage to stay. And hope is what I choose to hold on to now."

He added, "Please pray with us. And if (you) can be a voice for peace — through prayer, advocacy, or solidarity — I would be deeply grateful."