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## **For Immediate Release**

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### ***U.S. Service Members Plan Candle Lighting at Baghdad Presidential Palace to Remember Children***

As part of The Compassionate Friends annual Worldwide Candle Lighting, U.S. service members stationed in Iraq are being given the opportunity to participate in a memorial service Sunday, December 14 on the grounds of the Presidential Palace in Baghdad.

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting is believed to be the largest observance of its kind, focusing the world's attention on the death of all children, no matter the cause, age, or national heritage. Held each year at 7 p.m. local time the second Sunday in December, the candle lighting starts at the International Date Line and moves west through each time zone, creating a virtual 24-hour wave of light.

No one knows how many service members stationed in Iraq have suffered the death of a child, sibling, or grandchild. But one who has experienced the devastation of losing a child is Denise Mix, a paralegal with the Navy stationed at the Presidential Palace, who requested the service. Her six year-old son, Ty Harvey, died from cancer July 21, 2001 while she was on reserve duty in San Diego.

She attended several support meetings of The Compassionate Friends and a Worldwide Candle Lighting memorial service before being deployed to Iraq, where she decided a Worldwide Candle Lighting service would be helpful for morale, as the holidays approach.

"The military is not immune from loss [within our families]," said Legalman First Class Mix. "I think this will help the people back home to understand the military is trying to make things as normal as possible for us over here." Chaplain Frank E. Wismer III, who oversees Sunday services at the Presidential Palace, is planning the memorial service.

"I thought, here's someone who lost a child. She is still a mother even though she doesn't have a child anymore and needs a way to celebrate her child's life and we can do that here and do it as a community," said Chaplain Wismer, a colonel in the army reserves.

Plans for the service, which will be open to Iraqis working with the coalition provisional authority, include an opportunity to share a remembrance of the child, display pictures of the children, and the lighting of remembrance candles. The names of children being remembered by

service personnel in Iraq who may be unable to attend the service will be read.

“We are glad that our servicemen in Iraq will have the opportunity to join us in this meaningful remembrance of children who have died,” said Pat Loder, Executive Director of The Compassionate Friends, USA. “Our thoughts remain with them as well as all others who have suffered the death of a child, sibling, or grandchild.”

In the United States and other countries, hundreds of formal candle lightings are planned, many of which are listed on The Compassionate Friends national Web site. There will be thousands of informal candle lightings held quietly in homes. Intended to coincide with the Worldwide Candle Lighting, the United States Senate passed resolution 196 proclaiming December 14, 2003 as National Children’s Memorial Day.

The Compassionate Friends, founded in 1969 in England, today has a presence in an estimated 29 countries around the world, making it the largest self-help bereavement organization in existence. In the United States nearly 600 chapters now serve bereaved families covering every state in the country, plus Puerto Rico.

For more information on The Compassionate Friends and on Worldwide Candle Lighting services in the United States, call toll-free 877-969-0010 or visit the national TCF Web site at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org).