



IRAQI CHRISTIAN



RELIEF COUNCIL

DECEMBER 12, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – A BIPARTISAN LETTER SIGNED BY 38 MEMBERS OF CONGRESS SENT TO OBAMA REGARDING THE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN IRAQ.

As many of our supporters are well aware, since 2003 the Assyrian Christians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) among other minority groups have been subjected to intimidation, murder, and other despicable crimes. Our community in the United States, despite the challenges which it has faced, has not remained silent. American Mesopotamian Organization (AMO) and the Iraqi Christian Relief Council (ICR Council) are two organizations which have reached out and sought support from their fellow Americans regarding the plight of the Assyrian Christians of Iraq. We are pleased to report to all of our supporters that on December 9th, 2011, 38 members of Congress drafted and signed an important letter addressed to President Obama, urging the Administration to pressure the Iraqi government to take concrete steps to ensure “the long-term survival of these ancient faith communities” in Iraq. For the complete content of this letter, see below pages.

We at the AMO and ICR Council would like to thank all the 38 respected members of Congress for being the voice of the persecuted ethno-religious communities in Iraq. Furthermore, we would like to thank our supporters for uniting with our efforts in sending a strong message to both the American and the Iraqi governments articulating a significant message of concern and distress about our defenseless nation in Iraq.

Sincerely,

David William Lazar
American Mesopotamian Organization

Juliana Taimoorazy
Iraqi Christian Relief Council

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 9, 2011

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The President
The White House
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On the eve of your meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, we urge you to raise the plight of Iraq's besieged ethno-religious communities and press the Iraqi government to take concrete steps to ensure the long-term survival of these ancient faith communities as U.S. troops depart the country.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom described the nature and scope of the challenges which threaten the very existence of these communities in the lands they have inhabited for centuries in a recent report. In discussing Christians, Mandaeans, Yazidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Bahais, Shabaks and others, the Commission found the following:

"Since 2004, members of these minorities have been kidnapped, raped, tortured, beheaded, and evicted from their homes. Christians have seen their churches repeatedly bombed. The worst single attack against Christians was launched on October 31, 2010, during Sunday Mass. An al Qaeda affiliate assaulted Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Baghdad, killing or wounding nearly all of the more than 100 worshippers inside. Wijdan Michael, then Iraq's human rights minister and a Christian, said that the goal of the perpetrators was 'to empty Iraq of Christians.'"

Sadly, despite years of effort, these words continue to ring true. The U.S. State Department's 2011 Religious Freedom Report found that the Iraqi Christian population is 50% of its 2003 level, and perhaps lower. This is a staggering depletion of a community that dates back thousands of years.

Too often, attacks of the sort described above are not adequately investigated, prosecuted or punished, fostering a deadly climate of impunity.

Among the concrete issues that we encourage you to raise are: prosecution of acts of violence and discrimination against religious minorities; protection of places of worship and other vulnerable sites; increased governmental representation for minorities, including in the security force; and continuing discussions of an administrative region for religious minorities pursuant to ongoing political negotiations.

Importantly, the Iraqi Government needs to understand that the protection and preservation of these communities will be a key component of our future bilateral relations and

critical to our alliance, given its centrality to our own basic values.

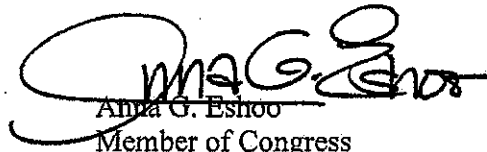
Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best wishes.

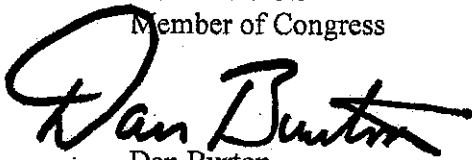
Sincerely,



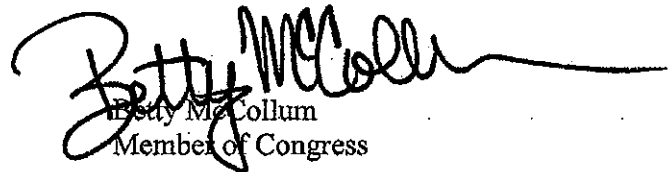
Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



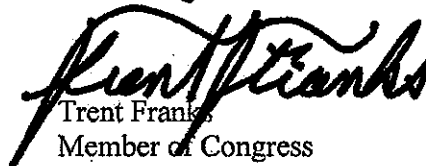
Dan Burton
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



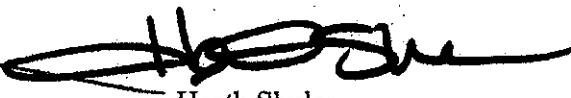
Gary Peters
Member of Congress



Trent Franks
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



Heath Shuler
Member of Congress



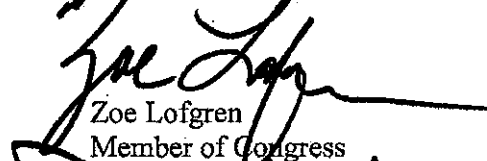
Luis Gutierrez
Member of Congress



John R. Carter
Member of Congress



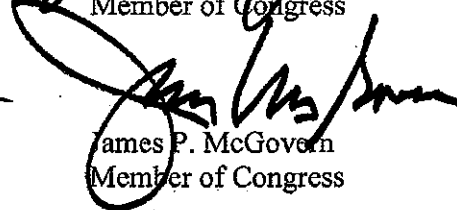
Henry A. Waxman
Member of Congress




Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress




Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress




James P. McGovern
Member of Congress




Sander M. Levin
Member of Congress



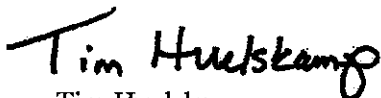
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



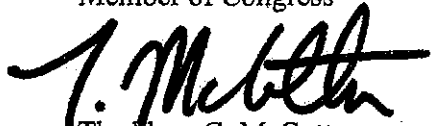
Tim Walberg
Member of Congress



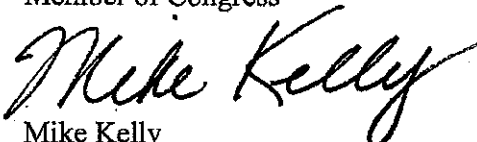
Ken Calvert
Member of Congress




Tim Huelskamp
Member of Congress




Thaddeus G. McCotter
Member of Congress



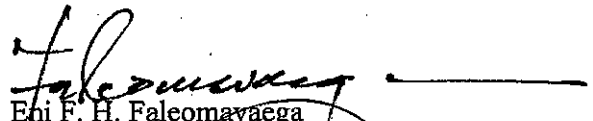
Mike Kelly
Member of Congress



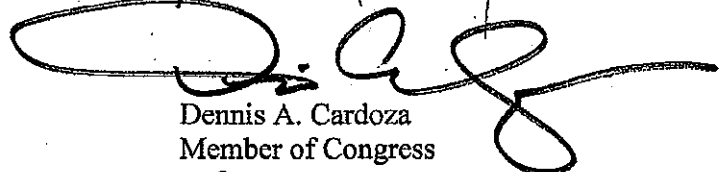
Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress




Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



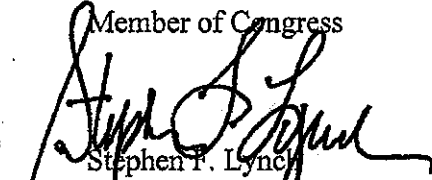
Eri F. H. Faleomavaega
Member of Congress




Dennis A. Cardoza
Member of Congress




Jesse L. Jackson Jr.
Member of Congress



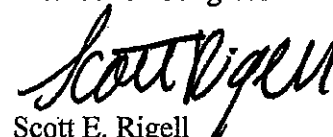
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



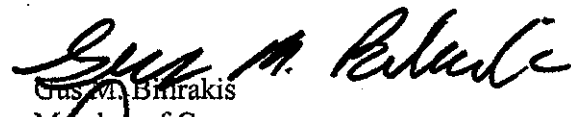
John W. Olver
Member of Congress



Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress



Scott E. Rigell
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress



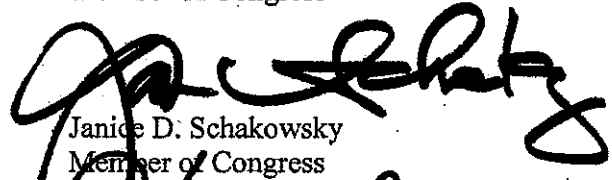
James P. Moran
Member of Congress



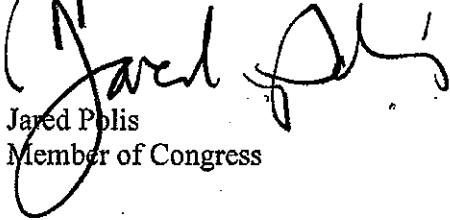
Robert J. Dold
Member of Congress



Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Howard L. Berman
Member of Congress