

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.

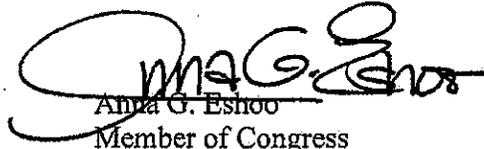
Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best wishes.

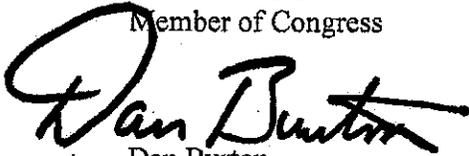
Sincerely,



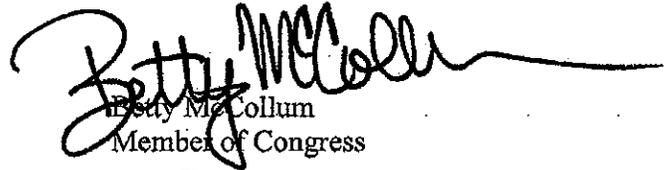
Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



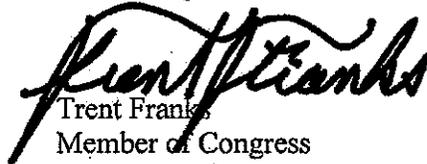
Dan Burton
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



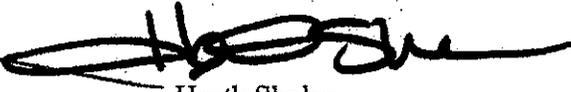
Gary Peters
Member of Congress



Trent Franks
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



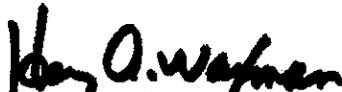
Heath Shuler
Member of Congress



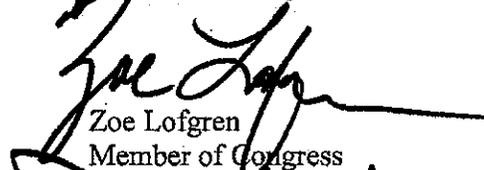
Luis Guterrez
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John R. Carter
Member of Congress



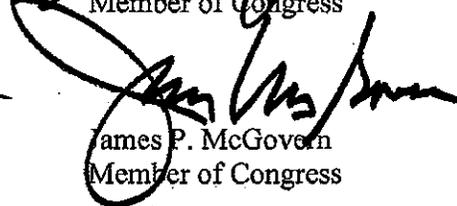
Henry A. Waxman
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Zoe Lofgren
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Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Sander M. Levin
Member of Congress



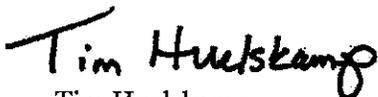
Steve Cohen
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Tim Walberg
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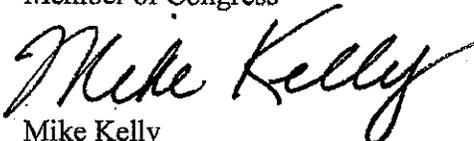
Ken Calvert
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Tim Huelskamp
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Thaddeus G. McCotter
Member of Congress



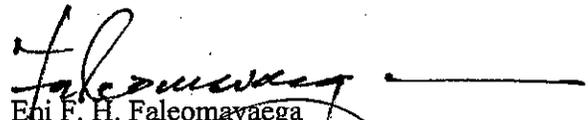
Mike Kelly
Member of Congress



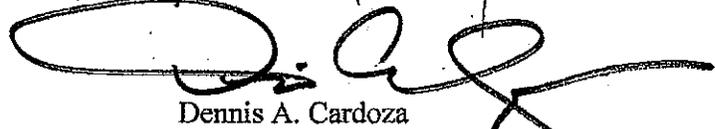
Joseph R. Pitts
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Christopher H. Smith
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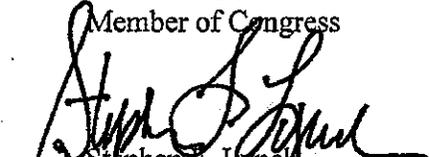
Eri F. H. Faleomavaega
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Dennis A. Cardoza
Member of Congress



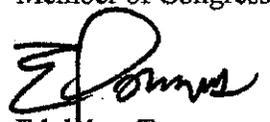
Jesse L. Jackson Jr.
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Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



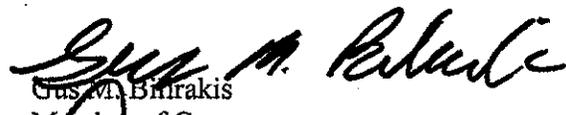
John W. Olver
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Edolphus Towns
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Scott E. Rigell
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Gus M. Bilirakis
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Chris Van Hollen
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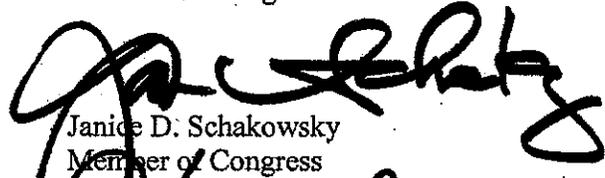
James P. Moran
Member of Congress



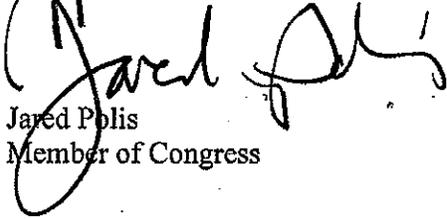
Robert J. Dold
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Jeff Duncan
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Janice D. Schakowsky
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Jared Polis
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Howard L. Berman
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