



## ***Committee on International Justice and Peace***

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September 16, 2015

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Fortenberry and Representative Eshoo,

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to commend you for sponsoring H.Con.Res. 75, the “Genocide” resolution. This resolution heightens awareness of, and draws much needed attention to, the ongoing atrocities being committed against Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities in many parts of the Middle East, but especially in Iraq and Syria.

In March 2015, I offered testimony to the Senate on religious persecution. I cited early 2015 United Nations figures that 4 million Syrians had fled the country, more than 7.5 million were internally displaced, at least 220,000 killed in Syria within the past 5 years, and close to 12,000 killed in Iraq in 2014 alone. Tragically, those numbers have increased. The flood of refugees arriving in Europe is evidence of the increasing dire circumstances in the region. As I testified, “these casualties and forced displacements are not due solely to religious persecution, but the weakening of the rule of law and the corresponding rise of extremist groups, many associated with ISIL, created the conditions where religious persecution could grow malignantly like a cancer unchecked. In Syria and Iraq, religious persecution is a distinct crisis within a wider crisis.” It deserves recognition as such.

Pope Francis, as you so rightly cite in your resolution, has denounced the persecution, torture and killing of Christians in the Middle East, calling it “a form of genocide” that must end. In condemning terrorism, he has also lamented the wider conflicts that have put so many in danger. Our Conference of Bishops has joined the Holy Father in condemning the actions of those who would persecute others solely for reasons of their faith or ethnicity. Following Pope Francis’ appeal that every Catholic parish in Europe house a refugee family from the Middle East, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, President of USCCB, encouraged all Catholics in America and “others of good will to express openness and welcome to these refugees, who are escaping desperate situations in order to survive.” He called on the U.S. government “to assist more robustly the nations of Europe and the Middle East in protecting and supporting these refugees and in helping to end this horrific conflict, so refugees may return home in safety.”

The aim of H.Con.Res 75 is to call what is happening in the Middle East to Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities a “genocide,” to commend those countries that are sheltering and protecting those fleeing violence, and to sanction and prosecute those doing the persecution. I join with others in supporting the resolution’s intent as it shines a spotlight on the reality of religious persecution in the Middle East. I hope it will lead to a more robust and coordinated national and international response to this “crisis within a crisis.”

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú  
Bishop of Las Cruces

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace