



Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

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March 14, 2008

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
The Honorable Wayne Gilchrest
The Honorable Timothy V. Johnson
The Honorable Walter Jones, Jr.

The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
The Honorable Gregory W. Meeks
The Honorable John P. Murtha
The Honorable Silvestre Reyes

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I commend you for sponsoring House Concurrent Resolution 228, expressing the need for more comprehensive and sustained diplomatic initiatives to address the ongoing war in Iraq.

For over two years, our Bishops' Conference has called for bipartisan action to bring about a "responsible transition" to end the war in Iraq. We remain convinced that our nation needs a new direction to reduce the war's deadly toll on Iraqi citizens and on regional stability. We need to bring our nation together to deal with the continuing moral and human consequences of the conflict. Our Conference welcomes this bipartisan resolution as a significant attempt to help break the ongoing political stalemate in Washington and fashion a new way forward.

We support the Resolution's emphasis on a comprehensive diplomatic initiative with a continued "drawdown and eventual departure" of our armed forces in a "responsible manner." In November 2007, our Conference stated:

...[B]uilding a just peace in Iraq requires far more than military action; it demands a comprehensive political, diplomatic and economic effort. This effort begins in Iraq, but it does not end there. For this reason, we believe sustained U.S. efforts to collaborate with the other nations, including Syria and Iran, are critically important for bringing some measure of stability to Iraq.

Our Conference especially welcomes the Resolution's clear concern for displaced persons and refugees and its focus on reconstruction and relief. Given our concern with protecting the most vulnerable, we have said that our nation's current policy neglects the dire situation of Iraqi refugees who have fled their country and internally displaced persons who have fled their homes. A disproportionate number of them are Christians and other vulnerable minorities. Funding for reconstruction is sorely needed to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure so that refugees may consider returning to Iraq.

The Resolution also recognizes the sacrifices of our military personnel and their families and the "comprehensive rehabilitation, physical, mental, and educational, economic assistance"

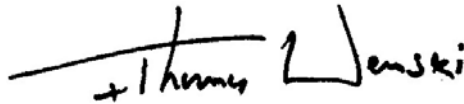
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that they deserve. As pastors, we believe our nation has a moral obligation to deal with the human, medical, mental health and social costs of military action.

It is our sincere hope that House Concurrent Resolution 288 will contribute to the morally and politically demanding, but carefully limited, goal of responsible transition that aims to reduce further loss of life and to address the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, the refugee crisis in the region, and the need to help rebuild that war-torn country.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski

Bishop of Orlando

Chairman, Committee on International Justice and
Peace