



Department of Social Development and World Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • FAX 202-541-3339
WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/SDWP

August 8, 2005

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

I write regarding the importance of working to ensure that religious liberty is fully respected in the new Iraq. Iraqis face many challenges in building a democratic, pluralistic, and prosperous nation. We believe that the success of these efforts will depend on respecting the fact that Islam is the religion of the majority of Iraqis, while ensuring full religious freedom for all, including minorities.

As the August 15 deadline for completion of the draft constitution looms, meetings are being held to finalize the language on religious freedom. Recent press reports suggest that that Islam may be enshrined as “the” sole source for legislation and not as “a” source. These reports also indicate that the Constitution prohibits any law that contradicts the tenets of Islam and that it fails to guarantee the religious freedom of individuals.

The fact that Islam is the religion of the majority of Iraqis must be respected. If Islam is the official religion of the state, however, or, if Islam is the sole source for secular laws, the religious freedom of minorities could be seriously circumscribed.

Religious freedom should apply both to religious bodies, such as the Shia, the Sunni and the Chaldean and Assyrian rites, and to individuals. If the constitution law grants only group rights, it could open the possibility that the rights of individuals could be suppressed based on their religious beliefs or practices.


Religious liberty includes a panoply of rights; it cannot be limited to “the freedom to practice religious rites” or “the freedom to worship.” Religious liberty includes the right to practice religious beliefs alone or with others, in private or in public; to acquire and hold property; to educate children in their faith; and to establish religious institutions, such as schools, hospitals and charitable agencies. Religious freedom also entails related freedoms, such as the freedom of speech and freedom of association.

Full religious freedom for all people and all religious bodies in Iraq would contribute to stability and help avoid sectarian conflict. Without guarantees of religious freedom, the ability of minority religious bodies to bridge sectarian divisions and contribute to the rebirth of a democratic and prosperous Iraq could be undermined.

Letter to The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
August 8, 2005
Page Two

I urge you to make every diplomatic effort to encourage Iraqi leaders to adopt full religious freedom in their new Constitution. This foundational freedom is critical to a just and lasting peace in Iraq.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Ricard S.S.J.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Most Reverend John H. Ricard, S.S.J.
Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee
Chairman, Committee on International
Policy



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The Honorable Stephen Hadley
National Security Advisor
The White House
Washington, DC 20504-0001

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