



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

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

June 17, 2011

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
Chair, House Foreign Affairs Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard Berman  
Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman and Ranking Member:

On behalf of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write in support of the general thrust of H.R. 1856, a bill to amend the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. USCCB was very supportive of IRFA and views H.R. 1856 as amplifying the intent of the original legislation and implementing specific steps to highlight the important role that religious freedom can and should play in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

In reviewing H.R. 1856, I am particularly pleased by provisions that would reauthorize the existence of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom until 2018, mandate that all foreign service officers receive religious freedom training, strengthen the Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation process and require more accountability in terms of U.S. action taken toward CPC states, and increase coordination across U.S. federal agencies to promote international religious freedom. These are all positive steps that will help raise the profile of religious freedom.

However, I am concerned that one provision in H.R. 1856 allows Commissioners to serve indefinitely, provided that they attend at least 75% of the meetings. The original IRFA language had limited Commissioners to two terms or a total of four years. This limitation allows for more diversity of views to be represented in the Commission over time and will expose more individuals to the work being done by the U.S. government to promote international religious freedom. We believe it is important that the term limitations for Commissioners be reinstated as it will improve the overall effectiveness and credibility of USCIRF. We have had three Catholic bishops serve on the Commission and they have rotated off to allow others to take their place.

The Catholic Church has long championed concerns about religious freedom around the world, teaching that religious freedom, rooted in the dignity of the human person, is “a cornerstone of the structure of human rights.” Pope Benedict XVI devoted his 2011 World Day of Peace message to religious freedom, calling it the “path to peace” as religion can contribute to “the building of a just and peaceful social order,” both nationally and internationally. In keeping with this teaching we ask that you give high priority to the passage of H.R. 1856, with the change in language to limit the terms of USCIRF commissioners.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard  
Bishop of Albany  
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

cc: House Foreign Affairs Committee Members