



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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September 4, 2012

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Chair
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard Berman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Ros-Lehtinen and Representative Berman:

It is a time of change in the Middle East. Many people clamor to have their voices heard and to have a say in the future direction of their country. Vibrant democracies rely on both majority rule and the rule of law – laws that protect all citizens, especially minorities.

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I commend Representatives Trent Franks and Brad Sherman for their leadership in sponsoring H. Res. 732. This timely bipartisan resolution calls for protection of the rights and freedoms of religious minorities in the Arab world.

While the focus of the resolution is on Christians in the Middle East, the USCCB reiterates its support for the protection of freedom of religion for all people, regardless of their faith. Each person should be treated with dignity and respect and allowed to participate equally in exercising their rights as members of a society. Protecting fundamental human rights, especially religious freedom, of all people provides the underpinning of a true democracy. It creates a healthy and dynamic society in which all citizens can share in benefits and opportunities.

The Catholic Church has long spoken out in support of international religious freedom and for the protection of human rights around the world. As this resolution details, religious minorities, especially Christians, are often attacked and killed and their places of worship, homes and businesses bombed. And after such attacks, religious minorities often face the additional obstacle of having police and judges discount or ignore their injuries and claims. Perpetrators frequently are not held accountable and the cycle of violence can continue with impunity. By recognizing and protecting religious freedom, an emerging democracy can build a society that is more respectful, tolerant and inclusive. The building of such democracies is good for all citizens, whether majority or minority, as they strive for stability.

Over 30 representatives have announced support for this resolution. The House Foreign Affairs Committee should act and pass this resolution to the floor. Point three of the proposed resolution is especially important. The United States Government should “lead an international effort to support legal and political reforms for the equal protection of religious freedom for all” in the region. To this end, it is critical to develop mechanisms to hold the Executive Branch, and particularly the Secretary of State, accountable for this

policy. The United States must continue to exercise its leadership in promoting protection of human rights, particularly religious freedom, as a cornerstone of its relationships with all nations. Please count on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to provide continuing, strong support of this laudatory initiative.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and
Peace

cc: Members of House Committee on Foreign Affairs