



## *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

February 9, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Clinton  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

Last March, as Chairman of the Committee for International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I wrote asking you to expedite the appointment of a well-qualified Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and to make that individual an integral part of your leadership team. But the position has remained unfilled for over two years. While you and other Administration officials have often stressed the importance of religious freedom, the lack of timely action to fill the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom compromises coordinated U.S. work for religious freedom.

Ongoing and escalating attacks against Christians in the Middle East and in other parts of the world and an increase in religiously-motivated conflicts point to the need to pay more, rather than less, attention to religious freedom. The New Year's Day bombing of a Coptic Church in Egypt, the Christmas Eve bombings of Christian churches in Nigeria, and the October 31 attack on worshipers at the Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad are grim reminders of what is at stake.

Pope Benedict XVI chose religious freedom as the theme for his World Day of Peace message for 2011 and for his annual address to the Diplomatic Corps. The Catholic Church has long championed concerns about religious freedom around the world, believing that religious freedom is closely tied to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and forms a foundation for human rights. Pope Benedict identified religious freedom "as the fundamental path to peace" and called for all religious and political leaders to "renew their commitment to promoting and protecting religious freedom, and in particular to defending religious minorities."

Given the growing influence of religion and religious actors in many countries, the U.S. government should be urging other governments to better protect the human rights, including religious freedom, of all their people, including Christians and other vulnerable minorities. A well-qualified and well-placed Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom remains critically important. Filling this position with someone who is knowledgeable about religious freedom issues around the world and about working within the department and across the U.S. government to advance the cause of religious freedom will be vital to demonstrate U.S. leadership in this crucial area, particularly as Congress considers reauthorizing the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act.

Sincerely yours,

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