



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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March 22, 2024

The Honorable Chris Coons
218 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Lankford
316 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tim Kaine
231 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thom Tillis
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Coons, Lankford, Kaine, and Tillis:

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write in support of S. Res. 569, which recognizes religious freedom as a fundamental right to be protected and preserved as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy.

The Catholic Church has long viewed religious freedom as a basic human right since it is rooted in the dignity of the human person and is critical to the health of societies. Over the years, we have seen international religious freedom increasingly imperiled as religious minorities are discriminated against, harassed, and even killed for their faith. During his apostolic visit to the United States in 2015, using Independence Hall in Philadelphia as his backdrop, Pope Francis [affirmed](#), “In a world where various forms of modern tyranny seek to suppress religious freedom, or try to reduce it to a subculture without right to a voice in the public square, or to use religion as a pretext for hatred and brutality, it is imperative that the followers of the various religions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance and respect for the dignity and the rights of others.” And in his [address](#) to religious leaders during a visit to Kazakhstan in 2022, he once again reminded us that religious freedom is a basic, primary and inalienable right that must be promoted everywhere.

In tandem with the Holy Father’s strong affirmation of religious freedom, I wish to express my support of S. Res. 569 and commend you for introducing this measure. This resolution is quite comprehensive in providing historical background as to why religious freedom is so important and listing “Countries of Particular Concern” and their religious freedom challenges. I certainly support the resolution’s urging the Department of State to continue bilateral engagement with allies on religious freedom as well as to impose sanctions to hold violators of religious freedom accountable while expanding support for human rights activists.

I recently sent [letters](#) to both the Senate and the House calling for the reauthorization of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). It is my hope that S. Res. 569 will complement and buttress the work of USCIRF. I greatly appreciate that S. Res. 569 shines a spotlight on the need to protect this vital human right, religious freedom, for all and would be happy to work with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

(The Most) Reverend A. Elias Zaidan, M.L.M.
Bishop of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace