

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 16, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

We write to express our grave concern regarding the recent persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East. While many of these communities have been vulnerable for some time, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) attacks within Iraq and Syria have specifically targeted Christians, Assyrians, Yezidis and other religious minorities.

As you know, in a video that came to light on Sunday, February 15th, twenty-one Coptic Christians were brutally beheaded by the ISIS. A week later, we learned of reports that more than two hundred Assyrian Christians, one of the world's oldest Christian communities, had been kidnapped. This is all set against the backdrop of the thousands of Christians who were driven from their homes in a matter of hours when ISIS seized Mosul and other strategic cities in the Nineveh Plain of Iraq last summer. During that same onslaught, Yezidi men were killed, women and girls were kidnapped, and some were sold as "brides" to ISIS fighters.

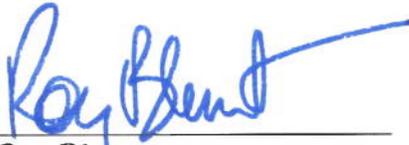
Unfortunately, our concerns about religious persecution are not unique to the chaos emanating from Iraq and Syria. The first week of March marked the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Pakistani Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, an outspoken opponent of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

The persecution of religious minorities in this region has been an exceptionally critical and ongoing issue in which Congress continues to take significant interest. On August 8, 2014, we were pleased you signed the *Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act* into law. This bipartisan bill authorized the creation of a Special Envoy for Religious Minorities in the region. It passed both chambers of Congress with unanimous support, but seven months later, the need for a high-level State Department official focused exclusively on this crisis is as acute as it has ever been.

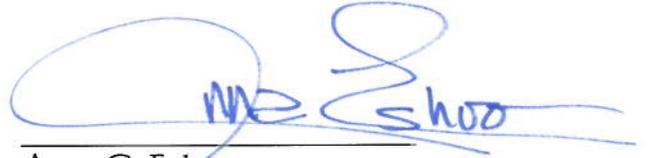
We write to urge you to move swiftly to appoint a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia, as the law states.

We appreciate your attention to this matter as we work together to advance the protection of these ancient faith communities and the fundamental human right of religious freedom.

Sincerely,



Roy Blunt
U.S. Senator



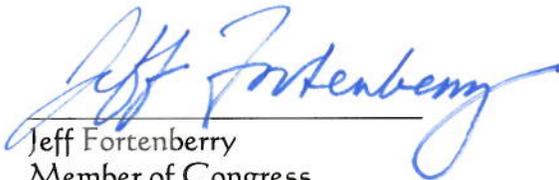
Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



J. Randy Forbes
Member of Congress



Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress



Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator



Gary Peters
U.S. Senator



James Lankford
U.S. Senator



John Boozman
U.S. Senator



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Barbara Comstock
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Chris Smith
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Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

John Conyers
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Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Lamar Smith
Member of Congress

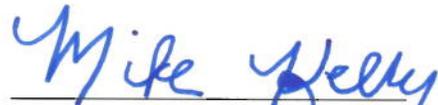
Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

John Cornyn
U.S. Senator

Mike Enzi
U.S. Senator



Jeff Denham
Member of Congress



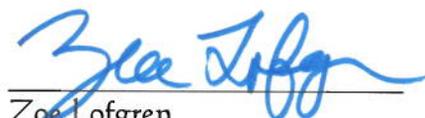
Mike Kelly
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
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Louise M. Slaughter
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Zoe Lofgren
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Tim Walberg
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Trent Franks
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Joe Pitts
Member of Congress



Robert J. Dold
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Sander Levin
Member of Congress



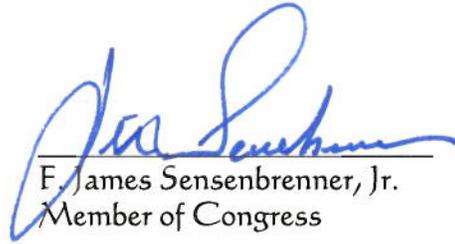
Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress



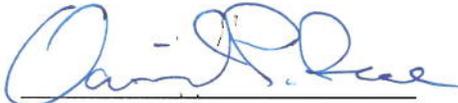
Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



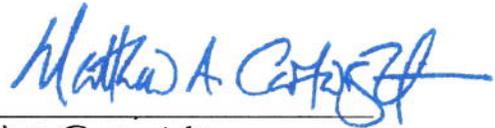
Steve Daines
U.S. Senator



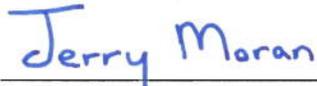
F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Member of Congress



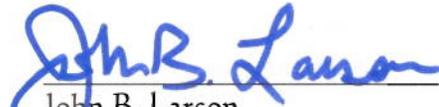
Phil Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress



Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress



Jerry Moran
U.S. Senator



John B. Larson
Member of Congress



Richard Burr
U.S. Senator