

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 1, 2012

The Honorable Salam Fayyad  
The Palestinian Authority  
Ramallah

Dear Prime Minister Fayyad:

We are writing to express our grave concern regarding the treatment of religious minorities in areas under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction. It has recently come to our attention that the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem, which has been operating unhindered under both Israel and the Palestinian Authority for the past 35 years, has recently been prevented from carrying out its functions as a legal church.

Of particular concern is the fact that since 2010, First Baptist Church has been attempting to resolve its current status, but has been unsuccessful despite meeting all of the requirements for recognition. As you are aware, an unrecognized church cannot secure birth, marriage, baptism or death certificates for its members. As you are also aware, without these documents, citizens under your jurisdiction cannot vote, cannot apply for passports, and are precluded from receiving other basic services from your administration. Without recognition, members of the First Baptist Church do not have access to the basic rights and freedoms guaranteed to them by Palestinian Basic Law. By refusing the First Baptist Church of Bethlehem full recognition, the Palestinian Authority is denying the church members basic human rights including religious freedom.

The undersigned Members of Congress find it deeply troubling that the members of an entire church have been disenfranchised. It is our hope that this matter will be rectified in a timely manner.

We urge the Palestinian Authority to allocate the proper time and resources to ensuring the safety and freedom of all civilians under its jurisdiction.

We respectfully ask that you process the required documentation for First Baptist Church and recognize it as a legal religious denomination of the Palestinian Authority, thereby reinstating religious freedom to the church's members. We greatly appreciate your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

  
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J. RANDY FORBES  
Member of Congress

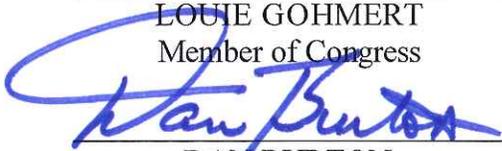
  
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Member of Congress



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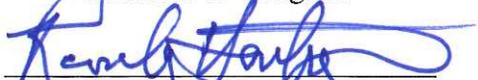
TODD AKIN  
Member of Congress



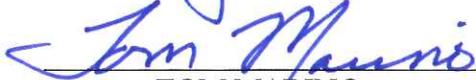
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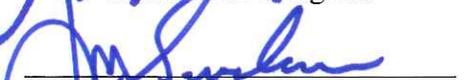
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MIKE KELLY  
Member of Congress

*Gus Bilirakis*

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GUS BILIRAKIS  
Member of Congress