

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

September 10, 2015

The Honorable Max S. Baucus  
United States Ambassador to China  
American Embassy Beijing  
Unit 7300 Box 0002  
DPO, AP 96521-0002

Dear Ambassador Baucus,

We write as members of Congress to express our concerns over the ongoing church demolition and cross removal campaign in Zhejiang province. Despite the U.S. raising concerns during the U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue last month, the campaign is expanding and authorities recently detained a prominent human rights lawyer offering legal assistance to the churches. With President Xi Jinping's upcoming visit to the United States later this month, we ask that you raise this issue with Chinese leaders, stressing both the damage done to China's global image and the evidence showing the economic, security, and social benefits of fully protecting the international right to the freedom of religion.

Since early 2014, Zhejiang authorities have forcibly removed at least 1,500 crosses from churches throughout the province. Despite the official claim that authorities carried out the campaign to enforce building codes, some churches that were affected had in fact fully complied with government requirements. Furthermore, reports indicate that Zhejiang Party Secretary Xia Baolong ordered church crosses be removed, and an internal government document received by *New York Times* last year shows clearly that Christianity and crosses as the intended targets of the campaign.

The provincial government's actions have sparked strong protests from the Catholic and Protestant Christian communities in Zhejiang. Police have violently broken up protests and jailed individuals seeking to save their churches. Religious groups are uniting to oppose the government's cross destruction policy, including unprecedented cooperation between government-approved religious groups and independent groups who refuse government oversight. In late August, authorities even detained lawyer Zhang Kai who organized a collective effort to defend the Zhejiang churches. He was detained the night before a scheduled meeting with U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom David Saperstein. Such an action is a clear setback for U.S.-China relations and should be communicated as such to Chinese leaders. Zhang Kai remains detained without access to a lawyer or his family and there is fear he could be tortured amid a broader crackdown on human rights lawyers and rights advocates in China.

As you know, the church demolition and cross removal campaign has garnered considerable attention from the United States and other parts of the world. The Zhejiang government's actions are a violation of China's obligations to protect religious freedom and tragically unnecessary as well. They foster distrust of the government among China's rapidly growing religious communities and squander the potentially enormous civic and economic assets they can bring to Chinese society.

We respectfully ask for your personal attention on these issues and that you raise our concerns with the Chinese government at all levels, urging an end to the demolition campaign and respect for the display of church crosses as a public manifestation of religious practice, in accordance with the Chinese constitution and international standards.

Nevertheless, given an increasingly abysmal human rights record and President Xi's bold disregard for the rule of law and China's international obligations, we have to ask whether the Administration should be publicly considering downgrading, conditioning, or even canceling the upcoming visit of President Xi Jinping or taking some other action that signals the importance of human rights and religious freedom to U.S. interests. It is increasingly clear that China's compliance with international law, ending Internet censorship, and protecting its citizens' fundamental rights are critical to the security and prosperity of the United States and the strengthening of U.S.-China relations. Pursuing human rights, the rule of law, or religious freedom as a separate track in bilateral relations sends the wrong signal to China's leaders and weakens U.S. leadership on issues of great interest to the American people.

We look forward to working with you on these issues moving forward.

Sincerely,



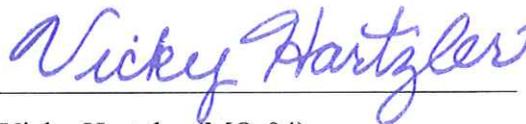
Trent Franks (AZ-08)  
Member of Congress



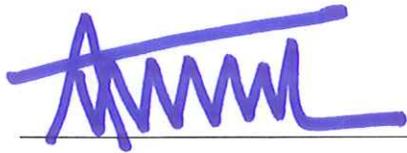
Chris Smith (NJ-04)  
Member of Congress



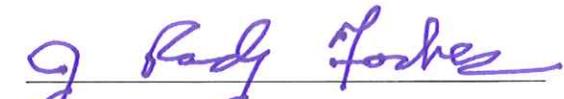
Joe Pitts (PA-16)  
Member of Congress



Vicky Hartzler (MO-04)  
Member of Congress



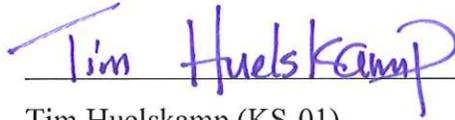
Ted Poe (TX-02)  
Member of Congress



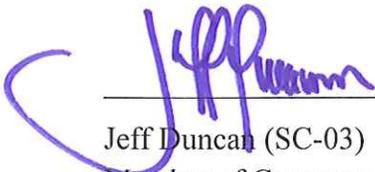
Randy Forbes (VA-04)  
Member of Congress



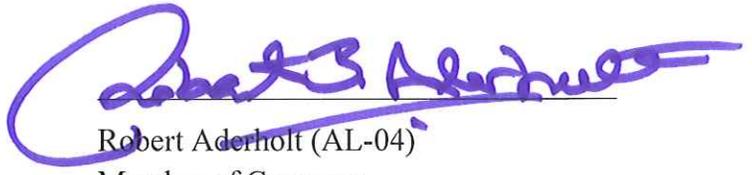
Brian Babin (TX-36)  
Member of Congress



Tim Huelskamp (KS-01)  
Member of Congress



Jeff Duncan (SC-03)  
Member of Congress



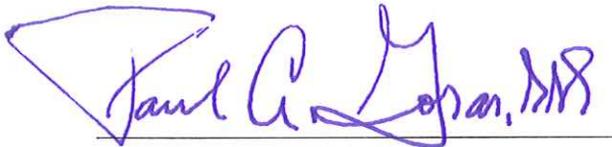
Robert Adenholt (AL-04)  
Member of Congress



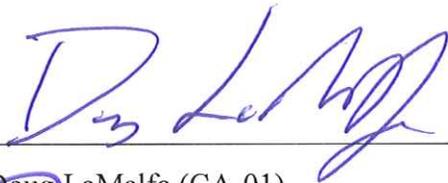
John Culberson (TX-07)  
Member of Congress



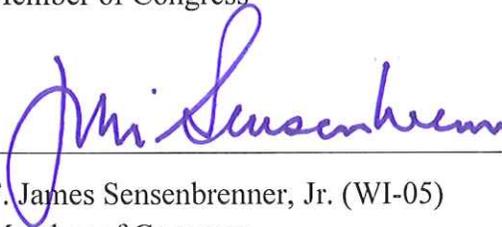
Daniel Webster (FL-10)  
Member of Congress



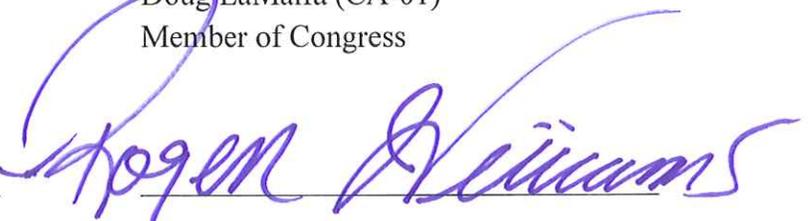
Paul Gosar (AZ-04)  
Member of Congress



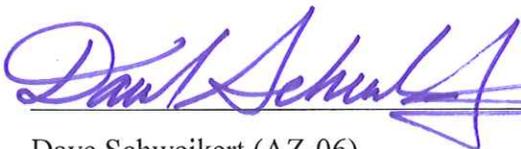
Doug LaMalfa (CA-01)  
Member of Congress



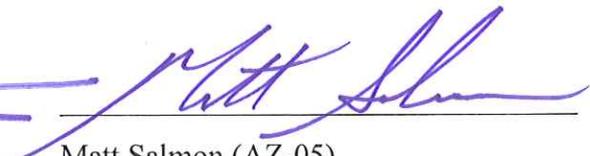
F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (WI-05)  
Member of Congress



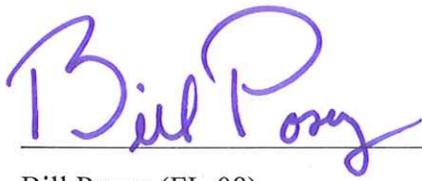
Roger Williams (TX-25)  
Member of Congress



Dave Schweikert (AZ-06)  
Member of Congress



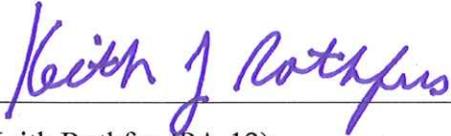
Matt Salmon (AZ-05)  
Member of Congress



Bill Posey (FL-08)  
Member of Congress



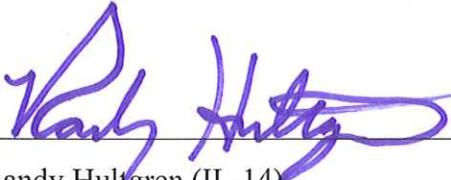
Lynn Westmoreland (GA-03)  
Member of Congress



Keith Rothfus (PA-12)  
Member of Congress



Dana Rohrabacher (CA-48)  
Member of Congress



Randy Hultgren (IL-14)  
Member of Congress



Mark Meadows (NC-11)  
Member of Congress



Paul Cook (CA-08)  
Member of Congress



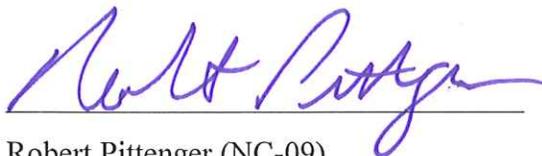
Eric Crawford (AR-01)  
Member of Congress



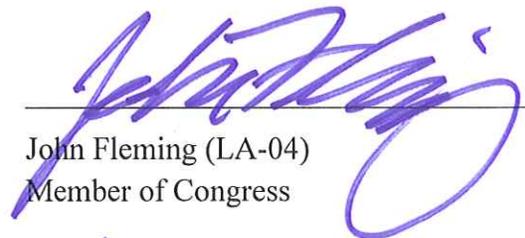
Doug Collins (GA-09)  
Member of Congress



Barbara Comstock (VA-10)  
Member of Congress



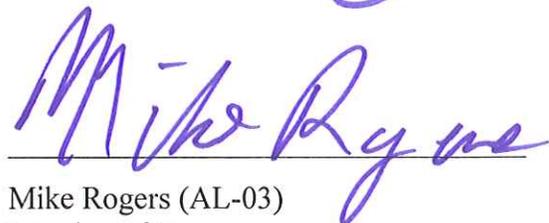
Robert Pittenger (NC-09)  
Member of Congress



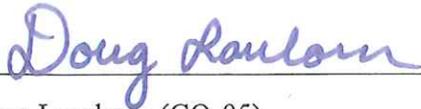
John Fleming (LA-04)  
Member of Congress



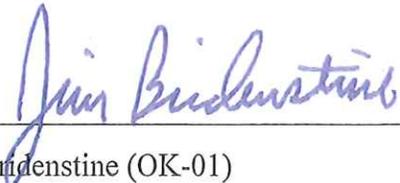
Gus Bilirakis (FL-12)  
Member of Congress



Mike Rogers (AL-03)  
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn (CO-05)  
Member of Congress



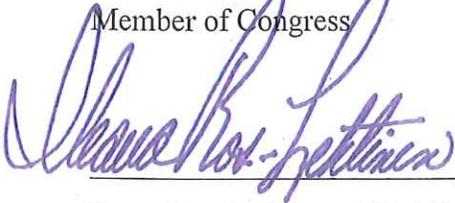
Jim Bridenstine (OK-01)  
Member of Congress



Bradley Byrne (AL-01)  
Member of Congress



Bill Flores (TX-17)  
Member of Congress



Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27)  
Member of Congress



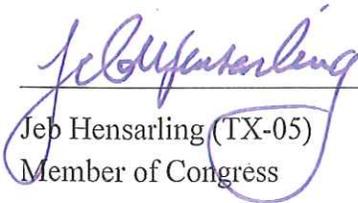
Mo Brooks (AL-05)  
Member of Congress



Mick Mulvaney (SC-05)  
Member of Congress



Andy Harris, M.D. (MD-01)  
Member of Congress



Jeb Hensarling (TX-05)  
Member of Congress



Lynn Jenkins (KS-02)  
Member of Congress