



Committee on International Justice and Peace Committee on Migration

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January 30, 2017

The Honorable Christopher H. Smith
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Smith and Eshoo,

As Chairs of the Committees on International Justice and Peace and Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), we commend you for introducing H.R. 390, the "Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief and Accountability Act of 2017."

In March 2016, you and many of the bill's bipartisan cosponsors were instrumental in ensuring the passage of H. Con. Res 75, the "Genocide Resolution" that drew attention to the atrocities being committed against Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria. We appreciate that this new legislation takes the Genocide Resolution one step further and seeks to help those who have been harmed and to hold the perpetrators accountable. In particular, it is noteworthy that H.R. 390 calls for assistance for survivors of genocide and would allow faith-based organizations (such as Catholic Relief Services) that are already providing humanitarian assistance to these populations, to make use of U.S. government funding in their work. The bill also would create a Priority Two (P-2) designation so that survivors of genocide have access to apply for resettlement in the United States.

The Catholic Church has consistently raised our voice in support of Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities who are facing persecution in the Middle East and are internally displaced or have fled as refugees. Pope Francis has denounced the persecution, torture and killing of Christians in the Middle East, calling it a "form of genocide" that must end, and lamenting the wider conflicts that have put so many in danger. USCCB has joined with Pope Francis in condemning the actions of those who would persecute others solely for reasons of their faith and ethnicity. While supporting this effort to increase access to resettlement for survivors of genocide, we also heartily support the Act's rule of construction that the most vulnerable refugees in Syria and Iraq who are not members of the designated group, as well as refugees elsewhere in the world, continue to have access to resettlement.

In testimony before Congress, USCCB has acknowledged that "these casualties and forced displacements are not due solely to religious persecution, but [to] the weakening of the rule of law" that has fostered the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS.

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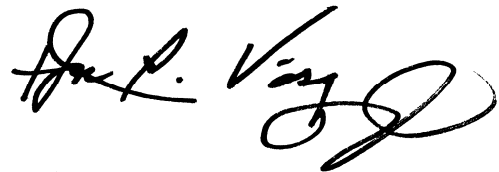
We call on the international community to use proportionate force to stop unjust aggressors to protect religious minorities and all civilians, but it is equally important to build inclusive governments that recognize the rights of all, and to provide aid to reestablish the necessary infrastructure for a viable economy. USCCB stands ready to assist in the resettlement of all vulnerable refugees from Syria and Iraq who are unable to return home.

We again commend you for your efforts to support the suffering victims of persecution in Iraq and Syria. We hope that this legislation will contribute to a longer-term solution to the crisis in the region.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signature of Oscar Cantú in black ink.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Handwritten signature of Joe S. Vásquez in black ink.

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin
Chair, Committee on Migration