

U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

November 5, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We are writing to you about the heinous attacks perpetrated against Baghdad's Assyrian Catholic community at Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church in Baghdad on October 31st. The attacks, apparently organized by Iraq's al Qaeda affiliate and targeted against Baghdad's ancient and imperiled Christian community, left more than fifty worshippers and police dead. Dozens more were wounded in this horrific event that represents the most deadly attack against Iraqi religious minorities since the 2003 invasion.

This tragic development is only the latest in a long and ongoing series of church bombings, kidnappings, and otherwise targeted violence against Iraq's dwindling community of Assyrians, Chaldeans, Mandaeans, Syriacs, and other indigenous communities. It also underscores the degree to which the U.S. continues to lack a clear, coherent strategy for the protection of these people who are central to the future of a democratic, pluralistic Iraq.

We are concerned that the administration has too often implied, as the previous administration did, that the attacks against Iraq's religious minorities are only part of a broader pattern of "generalized violence" that plagues Iraq. While there is little doubt that the country has been beset by all manner of violence, much of it directed against innocent civilians since the 2003 invasion began, it is critical that the U.S. government recognize that the religious minority groups have been subject to a specific pattern of violent discrimination, and as such, require a cohesive strategy for their protection and preservation.

These issues continue to be a congressional priority with bipartisan support. Earlier this year the House overwhelmingly passed a resolution expressing concern about the protection and viability of these vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq. While 2011 funding levels have not yet been finalized, in fiscal years 2009 and 2010, Congress appropriated specific funding for protection and development efforts aimed at Iraq's religious minorities, with a particular focus on the Nineveh Plains region. In addition to this designated funding, for several years there have been congressional calls, both in legislation and through letters to the State Department, for the development of a

comprehensive policy to address the unique needs of these besieged communities. The calls take on even greater urgency in view of the devastating attack of October 31st.

The creation and implementation of a comprehensive strategy is long overdue. While we've made significant progress in sharpening the focus on this issue, including the appointment of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Michael Corbin as the point person for religious minorities, much more is required. As we learned during a unique summit with several of Iraq's religious leaders this past summer, many members of the various minority communities are not even aware that specific U.S. development assistance is available to them because there is so little transparency in its disbursement.

Moreover, since the administration lacks a comprehensive policy, protection for religious minorities is marginalized in the broader security and assistance strategy for Iraq. While the Iraqi government has taken some steps to improve security around churches, these efforts are clearly insufficient. Individual Christians and Mandaeans have been consistently targeted in Iraq, and without real action to protect them, many continue to live in constant fear for their lives. A comprehensive policy would not only ensure assistance to the communities fleeing religious persecution, but would also articulate a security strategy to identify and prosecute those who attack them.

We respectfully request that the State Department take immediate steps to formulate and articulate a specific, comprehensive strategy for the protection of Iraq's Christians and other minority groups while a meaningful number still remain there. This strategy must demonstrate how ensuring the survival and prosperity of these ancient peoples is of the utmost importance to the long-term stability of Iraq's democracy. We further request that the State Department remain in regular contact with our offices throughout the development of the strategy, so we can be kept abreast of its progress and provide input.

We look forward to working with you and Deputy Assistant Secretary Corbin on this issue so that we might once and for all establish a clear path and formalized mission for the protection of these ancient peoples. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



Gary Peters
Member of Congress



Mark Steven Kirk
Member of Congress



Trent Franks
Member of Congress



Chris Smith
Member of Congress



Sue Myrick
Member of Congress



Scott Garrett
Member of Congress



Mike Pence
Member of Congress