

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

July 24, 2008

His Holiness Benedict XVI
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City State
EUROPE

-via facsimile-

Your Holiness:

It is with great respect that I write to you as both a Member of Congress and a Roman Catholic. Your witness to justice and advocacy of the plight of the persecuted is an instrument of hope.

Your Holiness has emphasized the importance to the Church of the well-being of the ancient Christian community of Iraq. It is now widely acknowledged to be an "endangered" community, with nearly half of its members forced to flee Iraq over the past five years. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration & Refugee Services reported last July: "Especially critical is the plight of Iraq's minority religious communities, including Christians and Mandeans (or Sabeans). These groups, whose home has been what is now Iraq for many centuries, are literally being obliterated — not because they are fleeing generalized violence but because they are being specifically and viciously victimized by Islamic extremists and, in some cases, common criminals."

As you meet with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki tomorrow, please know that the United States is shifting its burden to the Iraqi government. It is imperative that he acknowledge and commit to the future well-being of Iraq's endangered religious minorities.

Concerned Americans, including the ChaldoAssyrian Christians in my Congressional district, are anxious that the Maliki government address the following issues to ensure that the Iraqi Christians, who have made contributions to Iraqi society far beyond what their numbers suggest, and other smallest minorities are able to maintain their presence as part of the national fabric of that country: Security, including protection for their vulnerable clergy, development assistance, humanitarian aid for the large number of displaced among them, educational opportunities, full civic participation, including through measures to guarantee free and fair provincial elections later this year that would allow them just representation, and equal treatment under the constitution that would allow political autonomy in the Nineveh Plains.

Be assured that I will remain actively engaged with the ChaldoAssyrian Church and civic leaders in the United States and Iraq to protect the fundamental dignity of this oppressed ancient community of Iraq.

The psalmist seeking deliverance from his enemies remembers the great mercy of God. "Blessed be the Lord! For he has shown me the wonders of his love in a besieged city...Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord" (Psalm 31: 21,24) The Christians of Iraq have suffered threats of violence, kidnappings, murder and being exiled from their ancient homeland. And yet, they are resilient in the face of what is certainly an existential threat. Their great faith and your advocacy on their behalf, give them hope.

I have the honor to profess myself with the most profound respect, your Holiness,
sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. McCotter', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thaddeus G. McCotter
Member of Congress