

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CAPITAL MARKETS,
INSURANCE, AND GOVERNMENT SPONSORED
ENTERPRISES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

November 12, 2008

Dear Mr. President:

We are distressed by the mass flight of besieged and marginalized religious minorities from Iraq. Since 2003, over half the Christian and Yizidi and some ninety percent of the Mandeian communities of Iraq have fled. In the remaining months of your administration, we urge you to establish policies and guidelines specifically designed to preserve the presence of small religious minorities in Iraq and serve as a blueprint for the next administration.

Of immediate concern is the need for Iraq's government to act administratively to restore a provision in the new Iraqi Provincial Election Law which would set aside seats in Provincial Councils for the Christian Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac people and the other small minorities. As you are aware, September 24, 2008, Article 50 was stripped from the new electoral law adopted by Iraq's parliament.

The Christian political, religious, and civic leaders in Iraq are united in their demand for parliamentary set asides, which they believe are essential for guaranteeing a voice for Iraq's religious minorities. Furthermore, they view this as a litmus test issue. In 2005, voter disenfranchisement occurred in several areas as many members of minority communities were prevented from casting ballots. Consequently, these minorities have suffered political under-representation at both provincial and national levels. They see the failure of Iraq's parliament to pass Article 50 as an alarming deterioration of their protections. Were the new electoral law to be finalized without the guarantee of parliamentary set asides, Iraq's Christian Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriacs and other small religious minorities will lose hope they will ever be able to enjoy the rights of full citizens in their ancient homeland.

- Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has called on Iraq's Independent Electoral High Commission to rectify this problem through administrative means. We believe it is incumbent upon your administration to support Prime Minister al-Maliki in taking the additional needed steps to ensure this occurs.

In addition to ensuring electoral fairness, other political, economic, and security measures are urgently needed to sustain Iraq's small religious minorities. These include: building their capacity for self-policing, providing humanitarian aid for refugees displaced by violence and ethno-religious cleansing, ensuring their villages and areas obtain a fair share of aid for essential infrastructure and reconstruction, and providing them opportunities for higher education.

While Iraq's larger communities of Shiites, Kurds and Sunnis have made progress on all these fronts, the small religious minorities have not. They have suffered from majority policies and practices which marginalize and discriminate against them and often appear designed to drive them out. For example, in Mosul provincial authorities have thwarted Christian efforts to form a

legal and standard police force for two and a half years, even while the military surge drove terror northward. Christian and minority communities in Nineveh province have been left defenseless against terrorists and criminals, alike.

Because of the persistent lack of progress in these areas over the past five years, we urge you to consider the two following points:

- Leaders in the Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac political, religious, and civic community have raised the question of needing their own autonomous province on the Nineveh Plain. The formation of such autonomy may be the only solution to preserving these communities within Iraq. Your administration should carefully review this option.
- To forge an urgently needed consensus among these groups regarding long-term strategies and priorities for their preservation, we urge you to convene in Washington, D.C., a meeting of civic and religious leaders representing the small Iraqi minority communities, including those now in Iraq and those in the diaspora. State Department officials have had this idea under consideration for more than a year but have not taken action.

Without the hope of security and freedom to participate as equal citizens, the Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriacs, Armenians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Mandaeans, and others will continue their exodus from Iraq and those already in exile will not seek to return. Under the pressure of targeted violence and marginalization, their dwindling numbers in Iraq have rendered them "endangered" communities and are approaching the point from which they cannot recover.

Statistics show violence in Iraq has dramatically fallen. We fervently hope this continues. However, we cannot declare complete success while Christian and other religious minorities are being driven out and their communities eradicated. The failure to provide for their specific needs, including but not limited to parliamentary set asides, could contribute to a profound result -- the end of religious pluralism in Iraq for the first time in its many thousands of years of history.

For many reasons -- to be true to its ideals, to honor our nation's sacrifice, to take responsibility for its policies and to ensure a more successful Iraq -- your administration should undertake these actions to encourage and support Iraq's small religious minorities at this critical juncture.

Respectfully,



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Member of Congress

Robert B. Aderholt

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