April 16, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

We write to express our grave concern regarding the recent persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East. While many of these communities have been vulnerable for some time, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) attacks within Iraq and Syria have specifically targeted Christians, Assyrians, Yezidis and other religious minorities.

As you know, in a video that came to light on Sunday, February 15th, twenty-one Coptic Christians were brutally beheaded by the ISIS. A week later, we learned of reports that more than two hundred Assyrian Christians, one of the world's oldest Christian communities, had been kidnapped. This is all set against the backdrop of the thousands of Christians who were driven from their homes in a matter of hours when ISIS seized Mosul and other strategic cities in the Nineveh Plain of Iraq last summer. During that same onslaught, Yezidi men were killed, women and girls were kidnapped, and some were sold as "brides" to ISIS fighters.

Unfortunately, our concerns about religious persecution are not unique to the chaos emanating from Iraq and Syria. The first week of March marked the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Pakistani Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, an outspoken opponent of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

The persecution of religious minorities in this region has been an exceptionally critical and ongoing issue in which Congress continues to take significant interest. On August 8, 2014, we were pleased you signed the Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act into law. This bipartisan bill authorized the creation of a Special Envoy for Religious Minorities in the region. It passed both chambers of Congress with unanimous support, but seven months later, the need for a high-level State Department official focused exclusively on this crisis is as acute as it has ever been.

We write to urge you to move swiftly to appoint a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia, as the law states.
We appreciate your attention to this matter as we work together to advance the protection of these ancient faith communities and the fundamental human right of religious freedom.

Sincerely,

Roy Blunt  
U.S. Senator

Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

J. Randy Forbes  
Member of Congress

Jeff Fortenberry  
Member of Congress

Debbie Stabenow  
U.S. Senator

Gary Peters  
U.S. Senator

James Lankford  
U.S. Senator

John Boozman  
U.S. Senator

Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress

Barbara Comstock  
Member of Congress

Chris Smith  
Member of Congress
Dave Trott  
Member of Congress

Charles Rangel  
Member of Congress

Robert Pittenger  
Member of Congress

Mark Kirk  
U.S. Senator

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

John Conyers  
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Lamar Smith  
Member of Congress

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator

John Cornyn  
U.S. Senator

Mike Enzi  
U.S. Senator
Jeff Denham  
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress

Trent Franks  
Member of Congress

Robert J. Dold  
Member of Congress

Brenda L. Lawrence  
Member of Congress

Mike Kelly  
Member of Congress

Louise M. Slaughter  
Member of Congress

Tim Walberg  
Member of Congress

Joe Pitts  
Member of Congress

Sander Levin  
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress