



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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May 17, 2016

The Honorable Bob Corker, Chair
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Cardin, Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Corker and Cardin,

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I have written to your counterparts in the House in support of H.R. 1150, the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2015, and was pleased to see it advance. I understand that a companion bill, S. 2878, has been introduced in the Senate that is virtually identical to the House bill. I encourage you to take swift action to pass this important legislation that can help advance international religious freedom and protect those who find themselves persecuted because of their faith.

Violence has rocked so many countries around the world, much of it related to religious persecution by extremists or ethnic/sectarian tensions with religious overtones. The beheadings of Coptic Christians in Libya, brutality by ISIS-affiliated groups in Syria and Iraq, Muslim-Christian conflicts in the Central African Republic, Boko Haram attacks against both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, killings based on blasphemy allegations in Pakistan, kidnappings and forced conversions of young women from religious minority communities in several countries, and the persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar, are all examples of this tragic trend. Pope Francis said, "In this third world war, waged piecemeal, which we are now experiencing, a form of genocide is taking place, and it must end." He went on to say, "...there is no religious or human justification for it."

The Catholic Church views protection of religious freedom as a "cornerstone of the structure of human rights" since it is rooted in the dignity of the human person. USCCB worked with other faith-based groups and members of Congress from both parties to pass the landmark 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Given this engagement and the Church's ongoing concern over the plight of religious minorities, we strongly support S. 2878. This legislation updates the 1998 IRFA and provides more tools for the U.S. government to pursue international religious freedom goals. The legislation's provisions include:

- Increasing coordination across U.S. government agencies to advance international religious freedom policies and religious engagement strategies;
- Providing greater funding and staffing to the Office of International Religious Freedom and more authority to the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom;

Letter to Committee on Foreign Relations

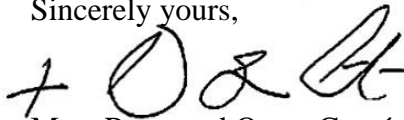
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- Specifying annual actions to be taken against countries with severe religious freedom violations as well as the authority to sanction individuals and non-state actors who commit such violations; and
- Expanding diplomatic training, counter-terrorism coordination, and foreign assistance efforts to reflect and incorporate religious freedom concerns.

Passage of S. 2878 would be another important step in improving the ability of our nation to advance religious freedom globally. It would reiterate the determination of the United States to promote and protect this most fundamental of human rights. We urge you to lend your support and pass this legislation.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oscar Cantú', written in a cursive style.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú

Bishop of Las Cruces

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops