



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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April 10, 2015

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

At Easter, Pope Francis acknowledged “the suffering of our many brothers and sisters who are persecuted for [Christ’s] name, and of all those who suffer injustice as a result of ongoing conflicts and violence.” The Holy Father went on to name violent conflicts in Syria, Iraq, the Holy Land, Libya, Nigeria, and most recently Kenya, many of which have a dimension of religious persecution or ethnic/sectarian tensions that have taken on religious overtones. The increase in violence perpetrated against religious minorities has reached staggering proportions. For this reason, on behalf of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I urge you to support and pass H.R. 1150, *The Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2015*.

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. The USCCB worked with other faith-based groups and members of Congress from both sides of the aisle to pass the landmark 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). IRFA created the Office of International Religious Freedom in the Department of State and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

Given this engagement and the Church’s ongoing concern over the plight of religious minorities, we strongly support H.R. 1150. This legislation updates the IRFA of 1998 and provides more tools for the U.S. government to advance international religious freedom goals, protecting those who are most vulnerable simply because of their beliefs. The legislation’s provisions include:

- Increasing coordination across U.S. government agencies to advance international religious freedom policies and religious engagement strategies, and raising the profile of international religious freedom by establishing interagency policy committees within the National Security Council;
- 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;
- Expanding diplomatic training, counter-terrorism coordination, and foreign assistance efforts to reflect and incorporate religious freedom concerns; and
- Reauthorizing the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom through 2021 and speeding the appointment of Commissioners.

Passage of H.R. 1150 would be an important first step in improving the ability of our nation to advance religious freedom globally. It would signify the determination of the United States to promote and protect this most fundamental of human rights. We urge you to lend your support to this legislation.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops