

**THE PLIGHT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES:
CAN RELIGIOUS PLURALISM SURVIVE?**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN
RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE PLIGHT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: CAN RELIGIOUS PLURALISM SURVIVE?

FRIDAY, JUNE 30, 2006

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS
AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:38 a.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Christopher H. Smith (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SMITH. The Subcommittee will come to order. Good morning, everybody. Since we have the distinct privilege of having the Chairman of the Full Committee, Congressman Henry Hyde, as our opening witness for today's hearing, I will defer opening statements on the part of the Members, including myself, and would welcome our very distinguished Chairman Henry Hyde, who I have known for my 26 years as a Member of Congress. He is probably the most passionate and the most effective debater I have ever known, and I think many of us share this view. In any debate any Member is ever in, you hope that Henry Hyde is the closer because nobody is more persuasive and articulate than the gentleman from Illinois.

He is also one of the most effective lawmakers, having written many laws as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, which is probably the most powerhouse-oriented, legislation-producing, Committee in the House of Representatives. Henry took the lead on so many important pieces of legislation over the years, and continued that tradition when he came over and became Chairman of the International Relations Committee.

It is truly an honor to serve with Chairman Hyde, and for such time as he would like, I yield the floor to Mr. Hyde.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE HENRY J. HYDE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

Chairman HYDE. Well, thank you, Mr. Smith. If I had known you were going to be so extravagant in your introduction, I would have come in sooner.

I want to thank you for holding this important hearing, and I want to thank Father Firas for coming all the way from the Holy Land to provide testimony. He will be discussing the plight of Palestinian Christians living in Aboud.

Over the course of the past 3 years, I have become increasingly engaged in the challenges facing Christian institutions and their communities in the Holy Land. The more I learn, the more I realize

how central their situation is to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The plight and security of Christians in the Holy Land is complex, and it is nuanced. There are historical, current, and future obstacles that threaten the survival of their community. A community not able to survive in its land of origin would be an historical injustice. We must do all we can to preserve the indigenous Christian community in the Holy Land.

My concerns have emphasized the current reality that this dwindling community faces. Ignoring the present challenges only adds fuel to the fire and accelerates the arrival of long-term concerns that are more difficult to resolve. I conveyed these concerns in a letter to then-Secretary Powell in 2004, and more recently to President Bush this past month. Through articulating these concerns, I do not wish to imply ill will toward either Israel or the Palestinians. My only intent is to report the facts and see how the United States Government can help to improve the situation without compromising Israel's legitimate security concerns or religious freedom in Israel and Palestine.

Palestinian Christians are increasingly finding themselves caught in the middle of a bipolar situation between Islamic and Jewish extremism. It is this divide that is undermining the pluralistic character of Palestinian society.

The implications of this reality has strategic implications on U.S. national security interests. If the heart of moderate and secular elements in Israel and Palestinian societies is weakened, it will derail the implementation of President Bush's vision of two states living side by side in peace and security.

The Middle East conflict is more towering than ever before. Perhaps we should consider setting aside past strategies that have not accomplished this bold vision, and find new ways to strengthen the peacemakers. One way to do this is to reduce the sources of extremism and strengthen the dialogue among religions as a bridge to peace.

Jerusalem is a universal city sacred to three monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The coexistence of the core narratives of the three monotheistic religions is not only what makes Jerusalem unique, but it also is the foundation of the stability of the city, if not the entire region. Maintaining the holy city's indigenous and multicultural identity is critical to preserving the declining pluralistic nature of the Holy Land's many fabrics.

The Department of State's *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* documents the destabilizing impact which the construction of the separation barrier in Jerusalem is having on its inhabitants. Local Christians view the barrier as something that is seriously damaging religious freedom in the Holy Land, impeding their access to important holy sites and tearing at the social fabric of Christian life by destroying the important linkages between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

According to the State Department report, the barrier blocks the annual procession on Palm Sunday from Bethpage into Jerusalem in commemoration of when Jesus began his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

I have been unable to understand how the currently routed barrier in Jerusalem which rips asunder the existential poles of Christian belief, the nativity and the resurrection, and encloses 200,000 Palestinians on the Jerusalem side of the barrier will improve the security of Israel's citizens. The fact that the barrier is to be lined with settlements discloses political goals irreversible in nature. These developments conflict with President Bush's repeated statements that the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than a political barrier.

The rapid decline of Jerusalem's interreligious narrative jeopardizes strategic American interests in the city and values shared by Americans of all faiths. Establishing physical embodiments of extremism at the volcanic core of the Middle East conflict precisely at a time when Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise threatens to transform a resolvable, negotiable territorial conflict into a religious war with global implications.

For so long Jerusalem has been viewed as a political obstacle to peace. I would like to suggest the opposite is true. Jerusalem is the key to preserving religious pluralism in the Holy Land. The political problems of the city are a microcosm of the broader conflict. Its repercussions are exported and felt throughout the world. If measures are taken to protect its religious and cultural diversity, the struggle to assert her identity will end, resulting in a peace that will reverberate throughout humanity.

If this goal is not achieved, I fear that important holy sites will become museums for commercial purposes and will no longer be maintained as places of spiritual worship shared by billions across the world. U.S. leadership is vital to safeguarding the integrity of the Holy Land and all its inhabitants.

Mr. Chairman, I want to congratulate you for your ongoing interest in this important, too often neglected subject, and your valiant struggle for human rights around the globe. And I ask to have the report on this subject which was prepared by our staff made a part of the record.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Hyde follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE HENRY J. HYDE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

Chairman Smith and Members of the Subcommittee,
I want to thank you for holding this important hearing.

I also want to thank Father Firas for coming all the way from the Holy Land to provide testimony. He will be discussing the plight of Palestinian Christians living in Aboud.

Over the course of the past three years, I have become increasingly engaged in the challenges facing Christian institutions and their communities in the Holy Land. The more I learn, the more I realize how central their situation is to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The plight and security of Christians in the Holy Land is complex and nuanced. There are historical, current and future obstacles that threaten the survival of their community. A community not able to survive in the land of its origin would be a historical injustice. We must do all we can to preserve the indigenous Christian community in the Holy Land.

My concerns have emphasized the current reality that this dwindling community faces. Ignoring the present challenges only adds fuel to the fire and accelerates the arrival of long-term concerns that are more difficult to resolve. I conveyed these concerns in a letter to then-Secretary Powell in 2004 and more recently to President Bush this past month. Through articulating these concerns I do not wish to imply

ill will toward either Israel or the Palestinians. My only intent is to report the facts and to see how the United States Government can help to improve the situation without compromising Israel's legitimate security concerns or religious freedom in Israel and Palestine.

Palestinian Christians are increasingly finding themselves caught in the middle of a bipolar situation between Islamic and Jewish extremism. It is this divide that is undermining the pluralistic character of Palestinian society. The implications of this reality have strategic implications on U.S. national security interests. If the heart of moderate and secular elements in Israeli and Palestinian societies is weakened, it will derail the implementation of President Bush's vision of two states living side by side in peace and security. The Middle East conflict is more towering than ever before. Perhaps, we should consider setting aside past strategies that have not accomplished this bold vision and find new ways to strengthen the peacemakers? One way to do this is to reduce the sources of extremism and strengthen a dialogue among religions as a bridge to peace.

Jerusalem is a universal city sacred to the three monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The coexistence of the core narratives of the three monotheistic religions is not only what makes Jerusalem unique, but is also the foundation of the stability of the city, if not the entire region. Maintaining the Holy City's indigenous and multicultural identity is critical to preserving the declining pluralistic nature of the Holy Land's many fabrics.

The Department of State's *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* documents the destabilizing impact which the construction of the separation barrier in Jerusalem is having on its inhabitants. Local Christians view the barrier as something that is seriously damaging religious freedom in the Holy Land, impeding their access to important holy sites, and tearing at the social fabric of Christian life by destroying the important linkages between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. According to the State Department report, the barrier blocks the annual procession on Palm Sunday from Bethpage into Jerusalem in commemoration of when Jesus began his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

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The rapid decline of Jerusalem's Inter-religious narrative jeopardizes strategic American interest in the city and values shared by Americans of all faiths. Establishing physical embodiments of extremism at the volcanic core of the Middle East conflict—precisely at a time when Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise—threatens to transform a resolvable, negotiable territorial conflict into a religious war with global implications.

For so long, Jerusalem has been viewed as a political obstacle to peace. I would like to suggest that the opposite is true. Jerusalem is the key to preserving religious pluralism in the Holy Land. The political problems of the city are a microcosm of the broader conflict. Its repercussions are exported and felt throughout the world. If measures are taken to protect its religious and cultural diversity, the struggle to assert her identity will end, resulting in a peace that will reverberate throughout humanity.

If this goal is not achieved, I fear that important holy sites will become museums for commercial purposes and will no longer be maintained as places of spiritual worship shared by billions across the world.

U.S. leadership is vital to safeguarding the integrity of the Holy Land and all its inhabitants.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for those very eloquent and persuasive comments. Before we go to opening statements, perhaps my colleagues might want to say a brief word or two, because I understand you have a plane to catch, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. McCollum.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this important hearing, because I think talking about the challenges among religions living side by side that have and for the

most part continue to live peacefully side by side in the holy sites in the Middle East is very important.

And, Chairman Hyde, I think you just gave me a way to not only in speaking with my constituents, but with school groups who ask questions about this, especially when I visit some of the Catholic institutions in my district. This is about keeping sites open and free for worship, not turning them into museums where we talk about how people used them in the past. I think that is a very, very powerful statement that is made.

And, Mr. Chairman, I thank you so much for having this hearing. And, Chairman Hyde, thank you so much for your words and for your persistence in having our guests travel so far to testify. I appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Kaptur, the gentlelady from Ohio.

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for allowing me to join, to listen to these hearings this morning. This is not my home Committee, but I absolutely wanted to be here to share the concern of Chairman Hyde and Chairman Smith and Ranking Member McCollum and all of those who are troubled by the suppression and the continuing exodus of Christians from some of the most troubled parts of the world, including the Middle East. And I can affirm that in my own community in northern Ohio, we have just opened a Coptic Christian church largely comprised of individuals who had to flee because of their inability to worship easily as they would wish.

As I look at what is happening in Israel and Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and as a result of my own travels there, in talking to Christians whose first goal was to leave because they found it more difficult and more dangerous to worship. In fact, one I wish to place on the record said to me—an owner of a small business in Bethlehem who I talked to in 1999 and I said, “You must be really excited about the upcoming millennium.” And he said, “Why would you think that?” And I said, “Well, you are going to make a lot of money; you will have a lot of tourists here.” And his answer was, “Lady, I am out of here.” And I said, “Why is that, sir?” And he said, “I am caught between two warring factions, and I have no chance.”

So I think to listen today, to learn, to try to share with our colleagues the testimony of those who have come from near and far, I thank Chairman Hyde for his championing of religious diversity around the world and for his service here these many decades, and I thank him for his testimony this morning. And I would only ask that if the witnesses have maps and additional information that we could make available to our colleagues, Mr. Chairman, I offer the assistance of our office in posting information on Web sites so that we can help to educate ourselves about this situation. And thank you, again, for allowing me to sit in this morning.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Ms. Kaptur.

Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for your testimony. I would submit that your comments ought to become mandatory reading for every Member of Congress. So thank you so much. It is a rare privilege to have you here at this Subcommittee hearing.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, now following Chairman Hyde's opening comments, the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Ops will hold an oversight hearing on *The Plight of Religious Minorities: Can religious Pluralism Survive?*

All over the world, unfortunately, religious believers endure discrimination and persecution, and often suffer far more from warring communal conflict than the average citizens of the lands where they live. We have many times in this Subcommittee highlighted their suffering and will continue to do so, but in most cases their existence as communities is not threatened. In fact, in many of these places religious belief and practice is growing. Despite severe persecution in place likes China and Vietnam of Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and Falun Gong, religion is nevertheless thriving. Truly we see daily proof of what the early Christian Tertullian said 1,800 years ago: "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church." despite discrimination and extreme violence, Christian minorities in India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia continue to grow.

Today's hearing will rather focus more narrowly on religious minorities whose very existence is threatened by war, civil conflict, severe discrimination, and outright persecution; communities whose continued existence is, however, vital for the development of civil society and stable and pluralistic democracy. The minority communities in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and the Holy Land and elsewhere have for centuries been bridges between their countries and the outside world, and they usually contribute a disproportionate share of the business leaders, teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers of their respective countries. They have been important channels for the introduction of democratic ideals and the development of civil society. Yet all are under great pressure, and their numbers are declining rapidly in absolute terms and in percentages.

We justly lament any loss of diversity in the material world, yet we all too often overlook the incredible diversity of religion, liturgy, culture, art, and history and literature which the Middle East represents. There are dozens of Christian groups with rich histories ranging from ancient Syriac and Assyro-Chaldean churches, which still speak the language of Jesus Christ; and Coptic churches in Egypt who preserve the language of the Pharaohs; through more familiar Greek Orthodox and Catholics; to vibrant young communities of evangelicals. And this is only a brief example.

There are followers of John the Baptist in Iraq and Iran. The Zoroastrians of Iran go back perhaps 3,000 years. It was under their tolerant influence that the Great King of Persia, Cyrus, ended the Babylonian captivity of the children of Israel.

There are Muslims of all varieties, Sunnis, and smaller groups within the Sunni tradition, such as Sufi sects and Wahhabis, Shiites, Druse, Ahmadis, Alawis, and others.

There are the Baha'is of Iran who grew out of the Muslim tradition into a universal religion of peace. The Jewish community in Iraq produced the Babylonian Talmud and countless scholars. Egypt became the home of that hero, the man, the great Moses Maimonides. The Jews contributed enormously to the flourishing of Islamic civilization, which in its time surpassed anything in the West. Yet members of all of these groups either suffered discrimination and persecution or lived with the constant threat of both.

Such persecution and discrimination on the one hand and economic insecurity and physical danger resulting from armed conflicts on the other has led to a dramatic and drastic and continuing decline in the Christian minority population in Palestine, Iraq, and Iran, and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt. The Jewish and Zoroastrian communities in Iran have also declined severely. Exact numbers are hard to verify, but the trend is unmistakable. If it continues, these communities will soon disappear. In many cases, the situation may be significantly worse than the numbers show since many of those who remain are old, while disproportionate numbers of young people have emigrated.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the population of Iran has nearly doubled. The number of Christians in Iran, however, has declined from about 300,000 to 100,000; and the number of Zoroastrians, formerly estimated to be 35,000 to 60,000, may be as low as 10,000. The largest non-Muslim group, the Baha'is, are generally not allowed to emigrate, but the persecution they have been subjected to is meant to exterminate them as quickly as possible. Baha'is are denied protection of the law against violence from an Islamic extremist, refused access to higher education, and periodically subjected to official detention, torture, and execution. Baha'i marriages are not recognized, rendering Baha'i married women subject to accusations of prostitution, and making Baha'i children illegitimate. Baha'is are not permitted to assemble, to teach, or practice their faith, or maintain links with their coreligionists abroad. Their religious property has been confiscated, and some of their most revered religious sites in Iran have been destroyed.

Iran was one of the last refuges for Jewish communities outside of Israel. The number of Jews, however, has declined from about 80,000 to about 25,000, still, tragically, the largest remnant in the Middle East of a community which once numbered over 1 million. Officially protected, they are under severe pressure from official policies promoting anti-Semitism. Members of the Jewish community have always been singled out on the basis of their "ties to Israel," whether real or perceived. The President of Iran, as we know, and other leaders have publicly denied the Holocaust, and stated that Israel should be "wiped off the map."

In 1987, the Iraqi census listed 1.4 million Christians. Today, it is estimated that there are only about 600,000 to 800,000 left in Iraq. As many as 60,000 or more, and perhaps even more, have fled since the Iraqi insurgency began. Their exodus accelerated in August 2004, after the start of the terrorist bombing campaign against the churches. In many parts of the Iraq there have been widespread reports of Christian small business owners fleeing the country due to newly instituted local regulations against the selling of alcohol, of Christian women threatened for not adhering to strict Islamic dress codes, and of Christians being denounced as collaborators with the United States.

At the time of the creation of Israel in 1948, it is estimated that the Christians in the whole of Palestine numbered some 350,000, in some 15 denominations—almost 20 percent of the total population at the time. The number of Christians in Israel and the West Bank is today about 175,000, with only 50,000 in the West Bank, just over 2 percent of the entire population. But the numbers are

rapidly dwindling due to mass immigration. The continuing conflict in Palestine has devastated the economy, particularly for Christian areas whose economies are heavily dependent on pilgrimages which are being severely disrupted due to both terrorism and the measures to counter it. Rising Islamic fundamentalism and continuing uncertainties about the legal status of the Christian communities in the Holy Land only compound the problem and push Christians toward emigration.

Egypt's 6- to 10-million-strong Coptic Catholic community has an immigration rate three or four times that of the Muslims. Coptic Church sources estimate that over 1 million Copts have left Egypt in the past 30 years. Each year, thousands of Copts convert to Islam, many under pressure. Violence against Copts by Islamic extremists often goes unpunished. The government discriminates against this large Coptic Christian population, as well as other Christian minorities, in part to appease the Islamists who threaten the regime. Egypt's small Baha'i community was made illegal 40 years ago, and the few remaining Baha'i are treated like nonpersons by the law.

But we must emphasize that Muslims are also victims. Shiite minorities suffer varying degrees of discrimination and persecution outside of Iraq and Iran, especially in Saudi Arabia where the ruling Wahhabi sect forces all Muslims, even Sunnis from different traditions, to adhere to its extreme fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. The Sunni minority in Iran suffers discrimination as well. The Ahmadis, mostly in Pakistan, consider themselves Muslims, but that status is denied them by the majority community, and they are treated as apostates. They are subject to mob violence and severe discrimination in all walks of life.

But even majorities suffer in these countries. No devout Shia in Iran can defy the mullahs. No faithful Sunni in Saudi Arabia can contradict the religious police. Muslims with different interpretations of sharia in Egypt can be excommunicated and forcibly divorced from their spouses.

There can be no better illustration of the principle that no one can be secure in his or her freedom unless everyone is. The continued existence and the protection of the rights of religious minorities will also be a guarantee for the individual rights of the members of majority religions. They are a flesh-and-blood pledge that freedom exists for all members of society.

We must all strive to protect these communities, not simply as museum pieces for tourists and scholars, but, as Pope Benedict XVI so eloquently stated recently, as living communities. As such, they are indispensable building blocks for the democratic, pluralistic, rule-of-law societies we hope to encourage. Only if these communities survive will we be able to honestly say that we have brought freedom to this vital region.

We will hear from our distinguished witnesses what we are doing to preserve religious pluralism and what more needs to be done. We are especially favored, as we just heard, by the testimony of Chairman Henry Hyde. John Hanford, our Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, will follow. And then I will introduce in order those who will be speaking, including Father

Firas, pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Aboud in Palestine, who will give testimony later on as we go through the panelists.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

The Subcommittee will come to order, and good morning to everyone.

Today the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations will hold an oversight hearing on "*The Plight of Religious Minorities: Can Religious Pluralism Survive?*" All over the world, unfortunately, religious believers endure discrimination and persecution, and often suffer far more from war and communal conflict than the average citizens of the lands where they live. We have many times highlighted their suffering, and will continue to do so. But in most cases, their existence as communities is not threatened. In fact, in many of these places religious belief and practice is growing. Despite severe persecution in places like China and Vietnam of Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, and Falun Gong, religion is thriving. Truly, we see daily proof of what the early Christian writer Tertullian said 1800 years ago: "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." Despite discrimination and extremist violence, Christian minorities in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia continue to grow.

Today's hearing will rather focus on religious minorities whose very existence is threatened, by war, civil conflict, severe discrimination and outright persecution, communities whose continued existence is, however, vital for the development of civil society and stable, pluralistic democracy. The minority communities in Egypt, Iraq, Iran, the Holy Land and elsewhere have for centuries been bridges between their countries and the outside world, and they usually contribute a disproportionate share of the business leaders, teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers of their respective countries. They have been important channels for the introduction of democratic ideals and the development of civil society. Yet all are under great pressure, and their numbers are declining rapidly, in absolute terms and in percentages.

We justly lament any loss of diversity in the material world, yet we all too often overlook the incredible diversity of religion, liturgy, culture, art, history and literature which the Middle East represents. There are dozens of Christian groups with rich histories, ranging from the ancient Syriac and Assyro-Chaldean churches who still speak the language of Jesus Christ, and Coptic Christians in Egypt, who preserve the language of the Pharaohs; through more familiar Greek Orthodox and Catholics, to vibrant young communities of evangelicals. And this is only a brief sample. There are followers of John the Baptist in Iraq and Iran. The Zoroastrians of Iran go back perhaps three thousand years: it was under their tolerant influence that the Great King of Persia, Cyrus, ended the Babylonian Captivity of the Children of Israel. There are Muslims of all varieties, Sunnis, and smaller groups within the Sunni tradition, such as Sufi sects and Wahhabis, Shiites, Druse, Ahmadis, Alawis, and others. There are the Bahai's of Iran, who grew out of the Muslim tradition into a universal religion of peace. The Jewish community: in Iraq produced the Babylonian Talmud, and countless scholars. Egypt became the home of that hero of all civilizations, the great Moses Maimonides. The Jews contributed enormously to the flourishing of Islamic civilization, which in its time surpassed anything in the West. Yet members of all of these groups either suffer discrimination and persecution, or live with constant threat of both.

Such persecution and discrimination, on the one hand, and economic insecurity and physical danger resulting from armed conflicts, on the other, has led to a drastic and continuing decline in the Christian minority population in Palestine, Iraq and Iran, and to a lesser extent in Egypt. The Jewish and Zoroastrian communities in Iran have also declined severely. Exact numbers are hard to verify, but the trend is unmistakable: If it continues, these communities could soon disappear. In many cases the situation may be significantly worse than numbers show, since many of those who remain are old, while a disproportionate number of young people have emigrated.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the population of Iran has nearly doubled. The number of Christians in Iran, however, has declined from about 300,000 to about 100,000; the number of Zoroastrians, formerly estimated to be 35 to 60 thousand, may be as low as 10,000. The largest non-Muslim group, the Baha'is, are generally not allowed to emigrate, but the persecution they are subjected to is meant to exterminate them as quickly as possible. Baha'is are denied protection of the law against violence from Islamic extremists, refused access to higher education,

and periodically subjected to official detention, torture and execution. Baha'i marriages are not recognized, rendering Baha'i married women subject to accusations of prostitution and making Baha'i children illegitimate. Baha'is are not permitted to assemble, to teach or practice their faith, or maintain links with co-religionists abroad. Their religious property has been confiscated, and some of their most revered religious sites in Iran have been destroyed.

Iran was one of the last refuges for Jewish communities outside of Israel. The number of Jews has declined from about 80,000 to about 25,000, still, tragically, the largest remnant in the Middle East of a community which once numbered over a million. Officially protected, they are under severe pressure from official policies promoting anti-Semitism. Members of the Jewish community have always been singled out on the basis of "ties to Israel," whether real or perceived. President Ahmadinejad and other leaders have publicly denied the Holocaust and stated that Israel should be "wiped off the map."

In 1987, the Iraqi census listed 1.4 million Christians. Today it is estimated that there are only about 600 to 800 thousand left in Iraq. As many as 60,000 or even more have fled since the Iraqi insurgency began. Their exodus accelerated in August, 2004 after the start of a terrorist bombing campaign against their churches. In many parts of Iraq, there have been widespread reports of Christian small business owners fleeing the country due to newly instituted local regulations against the selling of alcohol, of Christian women threatened for not adhering to strict Islamist dress codes, of Christians being denounced as collaborators with the United States.

At the time of the creation of Israel in 1948, it is estimated that the Christians in the whole of Palestine numbered some 350,000 (in some 15 denominations), almost 20 percent of the total population at the time. The number of Christians in Israel and the West Bank is today about 175,000, with only 50,000 in the West Bank, just over 2 percent of the entire population. But the numbers are rapidly dwindling due to mass emigration. The continuing conflict in Palestine has devastated the economy, particularly for Christian areas, whose economies are heavily dependent on pilgrimages, which both terrorism and the measures to counter it severely disrupt. Rising Islamic fundamentalism, and continuing uncertainties about the legal status of the Christian communities in the Holy Land, only compound the problem, and push Christians towards emigration.

Egypt's 6 to 10 million strong Coptic Christian community has an emigration rate three to four times that of Muslims. Coptic Church sources estimate that over a million Copts have left Egypt in the past thirty years. Each year thousands of Copts convert to Islam, many under pressure. Violence against Copts by Islamic extremists often goes unpunished. The government discriminates against its large Coptic Christian population (and other Christian minorities as well) in part to appease the Islamists who threaten the regime. Egypt's small Bah'i community was made illegal forty years ago, and the few remaining Bahai's are treated like non-persons by the law.

But we must emphasize that Muslims also are victims. Shiite minorities suffer varying degrees of discrimination and persecution outside of Iraq and Iran, especially in Saudi Arabia, where the ruling Wahhabi sect forces all Muslims, even Sunnis from different traditions, to adhere to its extreme fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. The Sunni minority in Iran suffers discrimination at the local, regional and national level. The Ahmadis (mostly in Pakistan) consider themselves Muslims, but that status is denied them by the majority community; and they are treated as apostates. They are subject to mob violence and severe discrimination in all walks of life.

But even majorities suffer in these countries. No devout Shia in Iran can defy the mullahs, no faithful Sunni in Saudi Arabia can contradict the religious police. Muslims with different interpretations of Sharia in Egypt can be excommunicated and forcibly divorced from their spouses. There can be no better illustration of the principle that no one can be secure in his or her freedom unless everyone is. The continued existence and the protection of the rights of religious minorities will also be a guarantee for the individual rights of the members of majority religions. They are a flesh and blood pledge that freedom exists for all members of society.

We must all strive to protect these communities, not simply as "museum pieces" for tourists and scholars, but as Pope Benedict XVI so eloquently stated recently, "as a living communit(ies)." As such they are indispensable building blocks for the democratic, pluralistic, rule of law societies we hope to encourage. Only if these communities survive, will we be able to honestly say that we have brought freedom to this vital region.

We will hear from our distinguished witnesses what we are doing to preserve religious pluralism, and what more we need to do. We are especially favored today by the testimony of the distinguished Chairman of the House International Relations

Committee, The Honorable Henry Hyde. He will be followed by The Honorable John V. Hanford III, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State and Ms. Nina Shea, Vice Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), who can speak authoritatively about the entire problem which concerns us. Our last panel will provide us with very direct accounts of the difficulties suffered by three groups. Father Firas Aridah, Pastor of Our Lady Mother of Sorrows Catholic Parish, in Aboud in Palestine West Bank; Ms. Rosie Malek-Yonan, Assyrian-American Author, and Ms. Kit Bigelow, Director of the Office of External Affairs, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States.

Mr. SMITH. I would like to now welcome our very distinguished Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, John Hanford, and just briefly introduce him.

From 1987 to 2002, Ambassador Hanford served as an expert on international religious freedom while working on the staff of Richard Lugar. And I would note parenthetically both I and others worked very closely with him in crafting the International Freedom Act, and he really carried the ball over on the Senate side and made a number of very important contributions to crafting and shaping that legislation. And it was very fitting that, at the end of the day, he became the Ambassador to implement that act, which was sponsored by our good friend and colleague Chairman Wolf.

Let me just now welcome him, because I do have a longer introduction which I will make, without objection, a part of the record. Ambassador Hanford, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOHN V. HANFORD III, AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ambassador HANFORD. Thank you, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding the very important subject of religious minorities in the Middle East.

I want to commend the Subcommittee's continuing interest in promoting religious freedom around the world. The work of the Committee raises the profile of this issue enormously; especially the Chairman has a great passion for this issue and has raised it ever since the day he walked in the door in Congress. And, of course, this all helps in turn me and others in the Administration to be even more effective in our work to promote and protect religious freedom.

I am going to give an abbreviated version of my remarks, but would ask that they be placed in their entirety in the record.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

Ambassador HANFORD. President Bush and Secretary Rice are deeply concerned about the plight of religious minorities in many countries around the world. Just 2 weeks ago, Secretary Rice spoke eloquently of the tragedy that exists when "people of faith can only whisper to God in the silent sanctuaries of their conscience because they fear persecution." Highlighting America's special privilege in this regard, she asked, "If America does not rally support for people everywhere who desire to worship in peace and freedom, then I ask you, who will?"

Religious freedom demands moral clarity, and Secretary Rice has been steadfast in asserting that no government has the right to stand between the individual and the Almighty.

With regard to minority religious groups in the Middle East, conditions vary enormously from country to country. While religious minorities in many countries of the region, including Lebanon, Bahrain, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, enjoy a substantial degree of freedom to worship openly, there are serious concerns in other countries where restrictions on religious practice can be among the most severe in the world. Certain minorities with historical roots in the region, including some Christian denominations and many minority Muslim groups, have developed a *modus vivendi* in many Middle Eastern countries, while members of other religions, especially some Protestant Christian denominations and Baha'i, face severe limitations, discrimination, and even persecution across the region.

Many countries in the Middle East, including Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, provide for freedom of religion or worship in their Constitution or basic law. In practice, however, strict limitations remain in place across the region on a number of religious activities. In addition, societal attitudes with regard to religious minorities often result in abuse and discrimination that goes unchecked by governments and in some cases is condoned and encouraged by governments. These and other factors have resulted in declining population in the region over recent decades for a number of religious minorities, including Christians.

I would now like to respond to the Committee's request to focus my remarks on the conditions for religious minorities in four countries, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt. Let me turn first to Iran, which was designated a Country of Particular Concern in 1999 for its severe violations of religious freedom.

Iran's religious minorities include Sunni and Sufi Muslims, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians. The Iranian Government's actions and rhetoric continue to create a threatening atmosphere for religious minorities, and in the past year we have witnessed an even further deterioration of the already poor status of religious freedom for the Baha'is and Sufi Muslims.

Iran's Constitution declares that the official religion of Iran is Islam, and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari Shi'ism. The Constitution also states that, within the limits of the law, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who are guaranteed freedom to practice their faith. However, in reality, members of even these recognized religious minority groups have reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. Non-Shia Muslim groups, including Sunni and Sufi Muslims, are also targets for government intimidation. Prominent Sufi leaders have reported harassment by the intelligence and security services, and in the past year government restrictions on Sufi groups and houses of worship have become more pronounced.

Sunni Muslims are the largest religious minority in the country. In practice, Sunni Muslims claim that the government discriminates against their faith in a number of ways. As an example,

Sunnis cited the lack of a Sunni mosque in the nation's capital, Tehran, despite over a million Sunni inhabitants.

Iran's hostility to the Baha'i community is a special concern at the present time. The Baha'i Faith is regarded by the government as a heretical Islamic group with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the country's Islamic revolution. While government officials have stated that, as individuals, all Baha'is are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under the articles of the Constitution as citizens, the government continues to prohibit Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith. Baha'is are barred from holding government posts and face discrimination in the university system and in the workplace. Baha'is repeatedly have been offered relief from mistreatment only in exchange for recanting their faith.

In March of this year, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief became aware of a secret October 2005 letter from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i to the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard, and the police force, which requested the agencies to collect information about members of the Baha'i Faith, and there have been a number of arrests that have occurred over the last year.

The Administration makes clear its objections to the Iranian regime's harsh and oppressive treatment of religious minorities through public statements, support for relevant UN and non-governmental organization efforts, as well as diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to government abuses. The Administration has also condemned the treatment of the Baha'is in UN resolutions, including one that passed in the General Assembly this past March.

Now turning to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was designated a Country of Particular Concern in 2004. In Saudi Arabia, no legal provision providing for or protecting religious freedom exists by international standards. Muslims who do not conform to the official version of Islam can be subject to discrimination and harassment, and sometimes abuse or imprisonment. Shia Muslims in particular experience discrimination in the political, economic, and educational spheres. Although private worship by non-Muslims is generally permitted, public worship is prohibited. The majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims, who predominantly adhere to the strictest Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, the strictest of Sunni's four legal schools. Religious minorities among the citizens of Saudi Arabia include the Shia; the Sulaimani Ismailis, a subset of Shia Islam; and Sufi Muslims. More than 7 million expatriates live and work in the kingdom, and include Muslims from the various branches and interpretations of Islam, as well as Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists.

As religious freedom is not a legally protected right, citizens and expatriates are vulnerable to harassment, arrest, detention, and possibly abuse for behaving according to the dictates of their conscience. Most non-Muslims are able to worship privately in their homes in the kingdom, and raids on private worship have markedly decreased, but still occur. Shia Muslims are still restricted in building places of worship. Shia Muslims also suffer from discrimination, and many Shia believe that openly identifying themselves by their faith can have a negative impact on various aspects of their life, including career advancement.

King Abdullah has led an active campaign in Saudi Arabia and in the Muslim world to condemn extremism and encourage greater tolerance. Earlier in June, the King gave a speech in the Qassim region, a very conservative part of the country, and urged greater religious tolerance and admonished those who spread dissension among Muslims. At the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit meeting in Mecca, Saudi Arabia played a leading role in condemning extremism, encouraging greater tolerance, and improving education in the Muslim world.

The U.S. Government has consistently advocated for religious freedom in Saudi Arabia. Ambassador Oberwetter has made advancing religious freedom and tolerance a priority for the U.S. mission. Senior officials, including myself, have engaged with senior Saudi officials when violations of religious freedom occur, and we frequently engage them on the problem of the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology, both within Saudi Arabia and around the world.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, we have been working with your office to schedule a meeting with the Committee to brief you on the details of our recent work with the Saudi Government which is related to CPC designation, and I look forward to having the opportunity at the Committee's earliest convenience to discuss this in the coming days.

Now, on Iraq. Just a few years ago, conditions for religious minorities were remarkably similar to those in Iran. In Iraq today, however, it is the government's policy to respect the rights of all religious groups to gather and worship freely. And, in practice, it does not place or tolerate restrictions on the rights of minority religious groups to practice their faith.

While much has been accomplished in Iraq, we recognize the unfortunate reality that acts of terror, the ongoing insurgency, and sectarian violence have impeded the ability of some minority religious groups to fully practice their faith. We are concerned about reports that some members of religious minority communities have been targeted as victims of harassment, societal discrimination, and violence. The coordinated car bomb attacks this past January on six Christian churches and the Vatican Embassy in Baghdad and Kirkuk were particularly troubling, and sectarian attacks and reprisals following the February 22 bombing of the Askariya shrine in Samarra, one of the most revered Shia religious sites in Iraq, are estimated to have claimed more than 1,000 lives and damaged more than 60 mosques across Iraq.

The Iraqi Constitution, which came into effect on May 20, is a significant accomplishment that lays a strong foundation for the protection of the rights of minority religious communities. Like the transitional administrative law before it, the Constitution places many guarantees, including the right of every individual to freedom of thought, conscience, and belief. And while the Constitution provides for the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people, it also protects the rights of religious minorities. Article II of the Constitution guarantees "the full religious rights of the freedom of belief and practice for all individuals, such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandeian Sabaeans."

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom problems with the Government of Iraq as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Senior U.S. Government and Embassy officials have supported the inclusion of religious minorities in the political and Constitution-drafting process and facilitated interfaith discussion with all members of the country's diverse religious community. To this end, U.S. officials at every level, including Secretary Rice, Ambassador Khalilzad, and our Embassy officers, regularly engage Iraqi officials and leaders of religious organizations on the problems faced by minority religious groups.

Finally, in Egypt there is discrimination against religious minorities including Coptic Christians, and the members of religions that are not recognized by the government experience personal and collective hardship. Notwithstanding this, however, the government has increased its overtures to the large Coptic Christian population in recent years. At the beginning of the year, a Copt was appointed as Governor of Qena, one of the 27 governorates, the first such appointment in over 30 years. In May of this year, President Mubarak named a Coptic Christian among seven judges appointed to the Supreme Constitutional Court, and in December of last year President Mubarak issued a new decree aimed at facilitating church repair and rebuilding, an effort to resolve a longstanding grievance of Coptic and other Christians in Egypt.

Unfortunately, church and lay leaders have noted both publicly and privately that this decree, like its recent predecessors, have proven largely ineffective as local-level officials continue to obstruct the issuance of the permits needed to perform maintenance, make repairs, or rebuild.

More broadly, Christians continue to face both official and societal prejudice and sectarian tensions, and even violence continues to flare up at times across the country. While there are no laws prohibiting conversion from Islam, security officials have been known to severely abuse Christians who have converted from Islam.

The Baha'is in particular have suffered discrimination after being stripped of legal recognition in the early 1960s. The government continues to deny civil documents, including identity cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community, and appealed a decision last April by the administrative court which had supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive such documents.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian Government has taken some steps to encourage greater tolerance for some minority faith groups. Interfaith dialogues have been sponsored by prominent Muslim and Christian groups, government-owned television has allowed some Christian programming, and the President has made several public statements urging support for minority groups.

Mr. Chairman, as the discussion of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt illustrates, the Middle East poses a significant challenge to us as we seek to promote religious freedom. You asked me to focus today in particular on the status of religious minorities in the region, but I want to make clear that the issue of religious freedom in the Middle East and our efforts to promote it extend well beyond religious minorities, even to members of majority religious groups.

Even in Muslim-majority countries, such as those in the Middle East, many Muslims are not free to practice as they please. I sometimes hear from Muslims who have immigrated to the United States that they have more freedom to worship according to the dictates of their conscience and beliefs here in America than they had in their country of origin where their faith was in the majority.

In closing, in the interest of time, let me just say it is my commitment as it is the commitment of both the President and Secretary Rice to continue to actively advance our efforts to promote tolerance and freedom in this region over the coming years. Mr. Chairman, I know you and your colleagues share deeply in this concern about the plight of religious minorities. Once again, thank you for holding this hearing and for your commitment to religious freedom. And I would be happy to take any questions you have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hanford follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOHN V. HANFORD III, AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Chairman Smith, Mr. Lantos, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding the very important subject of religious minorities in the Middle East. I want to commend this Subcommittee's continuing interest in promoting religious freedom around the globe, and yours in particular, Mr. Chairman. The work of the Committee raises the profile of this issue enormously, which in turn helps me and others in the Administration to be even more effective in our work to promote and protect religious freedom.

President Bush and Secretary Rice are deeply concerned about the plight of religious minorities in many countries around the world. Just two weeks ago Secretary Rice spoke eloquently of the tragedy that exists when "people of faith can only whisper to God in the silent sanctuaries of their conscience because they fear persecution." Highlighting America's special privilege in this regard, she asked, "If America does not rally support for people everywhere who desire to worship in peace and freedom, then I ask you: who will?" Religious freedom demands moral clarity, and Secretary Rice has been steadfast in asserting that no government "has the right to stand between the individual and the Almighty."

As Ambassador at Large, I feel a special obligation to bring the weight of my office, and the authority of the U.S. Government, to bear in assisting persecuted believers, wherever they are, and I have been impressed by the widespread conviction within the Administration of the importance of this mission. The conditions faced by minority religious groups vary greatly, and a detailed account of conditions in each country of the world can be found in the State Department's *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*. There are countries, of course, where believers of all faiths are persecuted—North Korea being perhaps the most extreme example. But in most places where religious freedom is not respected, it is the members of minority faiths who suffer both governmental and societal discrimination and persecution.

With regard to minority religious groups in the Middle East, conditions vary enormously from country to country. While religious minorities in many countries of the region, including Lebanon, Bahrain, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, enjoy a substantial degree of freedom to worship openly, the region also contains two of the eight named Countries of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. These two countries are Iran and Saudi Arabia, where restrictions on religious practice are among the most severe in the world. Certain minorities with historical roots in the region—including some Christian denominations and minority Muslim groups—have developed a *modus vivendi* in many Middle Eastern countries, while members of other religions—especially some Protestant Christian denominations and the Baha'i—face severe limitations, discrimination, and even persecution across the region.

Many countries in the Middle East, including Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen provide for freedom of religion or worship in their constitution or basic law. In practice, however, strict limitations remain in place across the region on such activities as proselytizing and conversion, and many governments openly discriminate against members of minority religions. In addition, societal attitudes with regard to religious mi-

minorities often result in abuse and discrimination that goes unchecked by governments, and in some cases is condoned and encouraged by governments. These, and other factors, have resulted in a declining Christian population in the region over recent decades, with the exception of the Arab Christian population in Israel.

Before turning to a description of the Administration's efforts to advance religious freedom in the region, I would first describe the conditions for religious minorities in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt.

IRAN

Let me turn now to Iran, which was first designated a Country of Particular Concern in 1999 for its severe violations of religious freedom. Iran's religious minorities include Sunni and Sufi Muslims, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians. The Iranian Government's actions and rhetoric continue to create a threatening atmosphere for religious minorities, and in the past year we have witnessed an even further deterioration of the already poor status of religious freedom for the Baha'is and Sufi Muslims. Following the June 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, the Government-controlled media intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly the Baha'i.

Iran's constitution declares that "the official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." The constitution also states that "within the limits of law," Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who are guaranteed freedom to practice their religion; however, in reality, members of even these recognized religious minority groups have reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. Non-Shia Muslim groups, including Sunni and Sufi Muslims, are also targets for government intimidation. Prominent Sufi leaders have reported harassment by the intelligence and security services, and in the past year government restrictions on Sufi groups and houses of worship have become more pronounced. For example, hundreds of demonstrators, including women and children, were injured when police and organized pro-government groups broke up a peaceful protest by Nematollahi Sufi Muslims in Qom, Iran, in February. Some 1,200 were reportedly detained and taken away in buses to an unknown location.

Sunni Muslims are the largest religious minority in the country. The constitution provides Sunni Muslims a large degree of religious freedom. In practice Sunni Muslims claimed that the government discriminated against Sunnis. As an example, Sunnis cited the lack of a Sunni mosque in the nation's capital, Tehran, despite over a million Sunni inhabitants.

Iran's hostility to the Baha'i community is of growing concern. The Baha'i faith is regarded by the Government as a heretical Islamic group with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the country's Islamic revolution. While government officials have stated that, as individuals, all Baha'is are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under the articles of the constitution as citizens, the Government continues to prohibit the Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith. Baha'is are barred from holding government posts and face discrimination in the university system and in the workplace. Baha'is repeatedly have been offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith.

The Iranian regime is also alleged to monitor the activities of the Baha'is. In March of this year, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief became aware of a secret October 2005 letter from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i to the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard, and the Police Force, which requested the agencies to collect information about members of the Baha'i faith. There were also reports that the Association of Chambers of Commerce compiled a list of Baha'i members and their trades and employment.

The Administration makes clear its objections to the Iranian regime's harsh and oppressive treatment of religious minorities through public statements, support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization efforts, as well as diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to government abuses. On numerous occasions the State Department spokesman has publicly addressed the situation of the Baha'is. The Administration has also condemned the treatment of the Baha'i in U.N. resolutions, including one that passed in the General Assembly this past March. The U.S. encourages other governments to take similar actions, and repeats its call to those countries with bilateral relations with Iran to use those ties to press Iran on religious freedom and human rights.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia was first designated a Country of Particular Concern in 2004, and it remains so today. In Saudi Arabia, no legal provision providing for or protecting

religious freedom exists by international standards. Muslims who do not conform to the official version of Islam can be subject to discrimination and harassment, and sometimes abuse or imprisonment. Shi'a Muslims, in particular, suffer from discrimination in the political, economic and educational spheres. Although private worship by non-Muslims is generally permitted, public worship is prohibited. And the state-controlled organization known officially as the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV)—otherwise known as the religious police, or "*Mutawwa'in*"—has harassed, imprisoned, and abused Muslims and non-Muslims alike who do not conform to its strict codes for behavior, dress, and worship.

I should also note a particular challenge in addressing religious freedom in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the spiritual center of the Muslim world and hosts Islam's holiest sites in Mecca and Medina. The Saudi government views its most basic duty—and the source of its legitimacy—to be the guardianship of the holy sites, maintenance and promotion of its interpretation of Islam and Islamic law, and hosting the annual Muslim pilgrimage, the Hajj. Islam is at the center of Saudi Arabia's national identity and pervades all aspects of national life. In addition, the idea of separation of church (or mosque) and state is not accepted by the vast majority of the population. I say this simply to provide some context and to illustrate the particular difficulty we face in promoting religious freedom in the Kingdom.

The majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims who predominantly adhere to the very strict Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, the strictest of Sunni Islam's four legal schools. Religious minorities among the citizens of Saudi Arabia include Shi'a Muslims, Sulaimani Ismailis, a subset of Shi'a Islam, and Sufi Muslims. More than 7 million expatriates live and work in the Kingdom and the majority of expatriates are Muslims from the various branches and interpretations of Islam, or Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. Every year, the Kingdom hosts more than 2 million Muslims for the annual Hajj.

As religious freedom is not a provided or protected right for any one in the Kingdom, citizens and expatriates are vulnerable to harassment, arrest, detention and possibly, abuse or torture for behaving according to the dictates of their conscience. Most non-Muslims are able to worship privately in their homes in the Kingdom, and raids on private worship have decreased but still occur occasionally. Four East African Christians were recently arrested by the religious police for leading a private worship ceremony in a rented building. Shi'a Muslims are still restricted in observing Ashura publicly and in building places of worship. Shi'a Muslims also suffer from discrimination and many Shi'a believed that openly identifying themselves as Shi'a would have a negative impact on career advancement. Citizens are also vulnerable to accusations of insulting the nation or religion and formal charges of blasphemy by the courts.

King Abdullah has led an active campaign in Saudi Arabia and in the Muslim World to condemn extremism and encourage greater tolerance. Earlier in June the King gave a speech in the Qassim region, a very conservative part of the country, and urged greater religious tolerance and admonished those who spread dissension among Muslims. At the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit meeting in Mecca, Saudi Arabia played a leading role in condemning extremism, encouraging greater tolerance and solving many of the problems plaguing the Muslim world such as poverty and weak education. The Kingdom has also established two new human rights organizations, which include both Sunni, Shi'a and Ismaili Muslims.

The U.S. government has consistently and forcefully advocated for religious freedom in Saudi Arabian. Ambassador Oberwetter has made advancing religious freedom and tolerance a priority for the U.S. Mission to Saudi Arabia. Senior officials, including myself, have engaged with senior Saudi officials when violations of religious freedom occur and have frequently engaged them on the problem of the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology both within Saudi Arabia and around the world.

IRAQ

Just a few years ago, conditions for religious minorities in Iraq were remarkably similar to those in Iran. In Iraq today, however, it is the Government's policy to respect the rights of all religious groups to gather and worship freely, and in practice it does not place or tolerate restrictions on the rights of minority religious groups to practice their faith. The designation of Iraq as a Country of Particular Concern was lifted in 2004.

While much has been accomplished in Iraq, we recognize the unfortunate reality that acts of terror, the ongoing insurgency, and sectarian violence have impeded the ability of some minority religious groups to fully practice their faith. We are con-

cerned about reports that some members of religious minority communities have been targeted as victims of harassment, societal discrimination, and violence. The coordinated car bomb attacks this past January on six Christian churches and the Vatican embassy in Baghdad and Kirkuk, were particularly troubling. Sectarian attacks and reprisals following the February 22 bombing of the Askariya Shrine in Samarra—one of the holiest Shi'a religious sites in Iraq—are estimated to have claimed more than 1,000 lives and damaged more than 60 mosques across Iraq. Those who attacked the Askariya Shrine sought to exploit divisions among the Iraqi public and the political leadership and sow sectarian strife. Iraqi government and religious leaders alike, in a demonstration of national unity, condemned the attacks and called for an end to sectarian unrest.

However, against this backdrop of sectarian violence and terrorist activity aimed at derailing the establishment of a government under the new constitution, Iraq's leaders and the Iraqi people achieved a critical milestone on May 20, 2006 by completing the government formation process. Iraqi leaders came together in agreement on a national unity government despite the efforts of insurgents and terrorists.

The Iraqi constitution, which came into effect on May 20, is a significant accomplishment that lays a strong foundation for the protection of the rights of minority religious communities. Like the Transitional Administrative Law before it, the constitution provides many guarantees, including the right of every individual to "freedom of thought, conscience, and belief." And while the constitution provides for the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people, it also protects the rights of religious minorities by specifically mentioning Christians and other religious groups. Article two of the constitution guarantees the "full religious rights of freedom of belief and practice for all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabians." The constitution establishes a framework for protecting minority religious groups by not only explicitly protecting freedom of religion, but by also guaranteeing other rights that are essential for religious minorities, such as the protection of places of worship, and the freedoms of assembly, association, conscience and expression.

Although Iraq now has a democratically elected government in place, major political challenges lie ahead, including the passage of enabling legislation for the constitution, and a constitutional amendment process. The process of the constitution's interpretation, implementation, and possible amendment will also be important. In our ongoing dialogue with Iraqi authorities, we will continue to encourage them to interpret and implement the constitution in a manner that protects the rights of Iraq's religious minorities. We will also continue supporting Iraqi efforts to strengthen the rule of law and ensure an independent and impartial judicial system.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom problems with the government of Iraq as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Senior U.S. Administration and Embassy officials called for unity in the face of sectarian violence, supported the inclusion of religious minorities in the political and constitution drafting processes, and facilitated interfaith discussion with all members of the country's diverse religious communities. To this end, U.S. officials at every level, including Secretary Rice, Ambassador Khalilzad, and our Embassy officers regularly engage Iraqi officials and leaders of religious organizations on the problems faced by the minority religious groups. Our Embassy has facilitated interfaith discussions and hosted meetings, roundtables, and exchange programs with the goal of promoting religious understanding and tolerance. In addition, U.S.-funded projects have worked with religious minorities by bringing together members of different religious and ethnic backgrounds to discuss common problems. We are committed to promoting religious tolerance and greater inclusion of minority religious communities in Iraqi national life.

EGYPT

In Egypt there is discrimination against religious minorities, including Coptic Christians, and members of religions that are not recognized by the Government experience personal and collective hardship. Notwithstanding this, however, the Government has increased its overtures to the large Coptic Christian population in recent years. At the beginning of the year, a Copt was appointed as governor of Qena, one of the twenty-seven governorates, the first such appointment in over thirty years. The president of the National Council on Human Rights, created by the Government in 2004, is a Coptic Christian, as are five of the 25 members. The Council has formed a 'Citizenship Committee' with a focus on religious freedom. In May of this year, President Mubarak named a Coptic Christian among seven judges appointed to the Supreme Constitutional Court. And in December of last year, President Mubarak issued a new decree aimed at facilitating church repair and rebuild-

ing, an effort to resolve a longstanding grievance of Coptic and other Christians in Egypt. Unfortunately, church and lay leaders have noted both publicly and privately that this decree, like its recent predecessors, has proven largely ineffective as local level officials continue to obstruct the issuance of the permits needed to perform maintenance, make repairs or rebuild. More broadly, Christians continue to face both official and societal prejudice, and sectarian tensions and even violence continue to flare up at times across the country. While there are no laws prohibiting conversion from Islam, security officials have been known to harass Christians who have converted from Islam.

Religious groups that have not been able to obtain official recognition also face serious problems in Egypt. Shi'a Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons are among those groups that have not been able to obtain official recognition and, as a result, sometimes face harassment from members of the security services. The Baha'is, in particular, have suffered discrimination after being stripped of legal recognition in the early 1960s. The Government continues to deny civil documents, including identity cards, birth certificates and marriage licenses to members of the Baha'i community, and appealed a decision last April by the Administrative Court supporting the right of Baha'i citizens to receive documents.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian Government has taken some steps to encourage greater tolerance for some minority faith groups. Interfaith dialogues have been sponsored by prominent Muslim and Christian groups, government-owned television has allowed some Christian programming, and the President has made several public statements urging support for minority groups.

The subject of religious freedom is an important part of our bilateral dialogue with the Egyptian Government, as well as with academics, businessmen and women, and Egyptian citizens with whom we have contact throughout the country. The Secretary, the Ambassador, and other senior U.S. officials have pressed for reforms, and the Ambassador has made public statements supporting interfaith understanding and efforts toward harmony and equality among citizens of all faiths. My office has worked closely with our Embassy to specifically raise our concerns with the Government about official discrimination against Baha'is. The United States supports the development of programs and materials that encourage tolerance.

ADDITIONAL U.S. EFFORTS

Mr. Chairman, as the discussion of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt illustrates, the Middle East poses a significant challenge to us as we seek to promote religious freedom. Yet in a region where so many key national interests come together—geopolitical, strategic, economic, humanitarian, and of course human rights—my experience has been that there is unanimous agreement that religious freedom needs to be among the key concerns we raise.

You asked me to focus today in particular on the status of religious minorities in the region. But I want to make clear that the issue of religious freedom in the Middle East, and our efforts to promote it, extend well beyond religious minorities even to members of majority religious groups. Even in Muslim-majority countries such as those in the Middle East, many Muslims are not free to practice as they please. Muslims in the United States tell me that they have more freedom to worship according to the dictates of their conscience and beliefs here than they had in their country of origin.

True religious freedom requires respect for minority faiths. But it also requires respect for differences within a particular faith. And it requires the ability to change one's faith. In many countries in the Middle East, all of these elements of religious freedom are lacking, for all people. It is for these reasons, as well as the suffering of so many who are being persecuted for their beliefs, that there is broad agreement throughout the U.S. Government on the far-reaching importance of religious freedom to our policy of promoting reform in the Middle East. Religious freedom constitutes a core element of our effort to promote democracy and human rights more broadly in the region.

Throughout the region, we are actively engaged with governments and civil society organizations, working with them to promote greater tolerance, interfaith understanding, and, ultimately, freedom for members of all faiths to practice according to the dictates of their conscience. In addition to the efforts I mentioned above, let me give you a few additional examples.

In the United Arab Emirates, U.S. Embassy officials meet regularly with the Under Secretary of Islamic Affairs to discuss religious freedom and tolerance, and last October the Embassy brought Imam Yahya Hendi, from Georgetown University,

to speak about Islam in the United States, the importance of establishing an inter-faith dialogue, and religious tolerance.

Our Embassy in Oman helped organize a program on interfaith dialogue for the Omani Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs during a recent visit. Likewise, our Embassy in Kuwait sent two Kuwaiti imams to the United States in a focused effort to demonstrate the scope of religious freedom here and to encourage the promotion of tolerance and inter-faith understanding. In Jordan, the Embassy sent religious scholars, including the Grand Mufti, to the United States for the same purpose, funded an interfaith conference designed to promote greater tolerance, and continued its multi-phase exchange program that brings U.S. religious leaders to Jordan and Jordanian imams to the United States.

Finally, in Bahrain, the United States funded "Arab Civitas" to help the Ministry of Education develop a civic education program for public schools which includes lessons on human rights and tolerance.

These are just a few examples of the ways that we are seeking to promote greater tolerance and freedom in the Middle East. There is much more to be done, and we continue to look for new ways to address this critical issue.

It is my commitment, and I know it is the commitment of both the President and Secretary Rice, to continue to actively advance our efforts to promote tolerance and freedom in this region over the coming years.

Mr. Chairman, I know you and your Colleagues feel as fervently as does Secretary Rice about this issue. Thank you for holding this hearing and for your commitment to religious freedom. I would be happy to take any questions you might have.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you so much for your testimony and for your activism, because I know you travel around to some of the most difficult parts in the world. You do raise this issue whether it be in the PRC or anywhere else where religious freedom is suppressed. So I commend you on your work.

I would like to ask a few questions. One of our witnesses later on today, Father Firas from Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Aboud, West Bank, makes a very, very strong appeal with regards to the security fence, and the fact that in his village of approximately 2,200 people, there are about 1,000 Christians, the rest are Muslim. He points out that the two groups get along very well and they even have a Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prayer service that meets. And yet, as a result of the security fence, there are severe dislocations and what he argues are very discriminatory outcomes as a result of this fence.

I know that the Israeli Supreme Court has intervened on the side of those who have argued against the fence. While, as President Bush has said, the fence should be temporary, and it should be absolutely focused just on security, obviously it did not arise out of a vacuum—it was the suicide bombers who were the proximate cause for its erection. But the concern that its path results in the takings of land, water, and other resources is not without merit and I think raises very significant issues. Father Firas points out the impact it has had on his parish, and it has not been good. It has been very, very severe.

My question is, has there been any systematic effort made by your office, by the Secretary of State, and by the President, or anyone else—including our U.S. Ambassador to Israel—to raise the issue of the dispossessed Christian communities, the Palestinian Christian communities, and others? And what were those interventions? What has been the response on the part of the Government of Israel?

I am one of those who have fought for years against the rising tide of anti-Semitism. I have held numerous hearings on anti-Semitism. The idea of an OSCE meeting, a conclave which was held

first in Austria, then in Berlin with foreign ministers, and then in Cordoba last year, was my idea. So I take a back seat to no one on pressing the case that anti-Semitism is a vile, ugly manifestation of hate. Sharansky has been before my Committee, both the Helsinki Commission as well as this Subcommittee, on numerous occasions. And I was even the House sponsor of the Anti-Semitism Global Review Act. Senator Voinovich was the sponsor over on the Senate side.

But my argument is that we need reciprocity. So I would ask you, what have you done on this issue?

Ambassador HANFORD. You have certainly earned the right to be heard on this issue by the work that you have done on anti-Semitism over the years, as I have observed it, going way back to working on behalf of persecuted Jews in the Soviet Union days and helping them to leave.

This issue is one of great concern to my office and to the Administration, and we certainly raise this issue regularly. Of course, the context of this that I know you agree with is that Israel has the right to defend itself. While we urge the Israeli Government to be careful, to ensure that innocent civilians are not harmed or restricted in any way in the practice of their religious beliefs, we realize that they face certain threats. And we ultimately stress that it is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority to stop all acts of violence and terror. And, of course, instead Hamas been complicit in perpetrating violence, terror, and now in hostage-taking.

President Abbas has taken some steps to eliminate religious incitement, although there have been incidents of government collusion to extort property from Christian land owners in the Bethlehem area. So that is a problem on the Palestinian side that we have had to deal with.

Now, when it comes to the separation barrier, we have been very concerned that this restricts the ability of Palestinians, Christians, Muslims, both, to worship freely. And we are in close consultation with the Government of Israel on the routing of the separation barrier, especially with regard to human rights issues, including religious freedom. We have specifically discussed access of religious groups to sites in the East Jerusalem area through the Mount of Olives and certain routings of the barrier in the Bethlehem area. And my office has been there, we have seen the problems. We have raised cases where a convent is going to be cut in two by the barrier and things of this sort. And this is something we are committed to being vigilant on, and would certainly welcome and appreciate continued cooperation with your office and others as we seek to do this.

Mr. SMITH. Has the Palestinian and Israeli leadership been responsive to our efforts? It seems to me that we understand the issue of eminent domain when it comes to highways, bridges, and certainly a security fence—when there is a security threat that is unprecedented against Israel. But the flip side is that the aggrieved party has to mount a court case, which can be long, laborious, and expensive—and then a coin flip as to whether or not it results in a positive outcome. Obviously diplomacy could have a laudable effect on this process.

Have we had successes? Are they listening? One of the reasons why this hearing is important and why Chairman Hyde felt it so necessary to testify was to underscore congressional concern. I believe it is bipartisan. And friends don't let friends commit human rights abuses anywhere in the world. And I think when it comes to Israel, there is no greater friend than the United States. So when we speak, we speak out of concern for Israel, but also out of concern for those who are being malaffected, in this case Christians who are having convents cut in half, land expropriated without a serious concern about—at least as far as I can tell in some of these cases—to security. There is an arbitrariness about it that is concerning.

Ambassador HANFORD. Even supporters of the barrier people that understand the security risk and have raised these other issues with Israel, we have sometimes been frustrated by our inability to understand the logic of why the barrier has to cut through properties. And these are the sorts of things that we raise. We are urging the government to find ways to have the barrier and yet allow access—to choose a route or to allow access.

As you know, there have been problems where, as Chairman Hyde mentioned, annual processions and religious activities are also greatly restricted by the construction of the barrier. So, Mr. Chairman, we are raising these with some successes, but sometimes we come away unable to understand the insistence on the route being maintained.

Mr. SMITH. Has your office looked into Father's Firas' specific case?

Ambassador HANFORD. I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. SMITH. Could you, and get back to us and let us know?

Ambassador HANFORD. I sure will.

Mr. SMITH. I appreciate it.

[The information referred to follows:]

WRITTEN RESPONSE RECEIVED FROM THE HONORABLE JOHN HANFORD TO QUESTION
ASKED DURING THE HEARING BY THE HONORABLE CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

Yes we have. My office is aware of the challenges faced by Father Firas' community in the West Bank town of Aboud. The separation barrier hampers his ability to serve his religious community.

As our *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* makes clear, the separation barrier severely limits access to holy sites, and seriously impedes the work of religious organizations that provide education, healthcare, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians.

We are very concerned about the increased burden Israel's separation barrier has wrought on the ability for Christians and Muslims to practice their faith in a free and unencumbered manner. My office has met with Israeli officials to discuss changes to the route of the barrier to lessen the impact on communities of faith.

My office also meets regularly with NGOs and community leaders to underscore the importance of the issue of decreased access of religious minorities to scarce space in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. We will continue to seek effective ways to engage the authorities on these problems.

Mr. SMITH. Egypt and Pakistan, as we all know, are among the largest recipients of U.S. foreign assistance. Have we given them any kind of road map as to what we expect them to do with regard to religious diversity and respect for religious rights?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, I have worked on Egypt over many years, and I guess the road map that we have given is to regularly raise significant restrictions on religious freedom or cases where

there are outbreaks of persecution. I mentioned the Baha'is, I mentioned the Copts, which are a very large minority there and which face extraordinary frustrations; just in repairing a church, they can wait 10 or 15 years to get permission. It is required to get permission from the President just to repair a church much less to build a new structure, and some of these laws seemed intended to disadvantage minority faiths.

The laws can also be handled in ways that are abusive. There is a law that prohibits any religion other than Islam from building a structure within 100 yards of a mosque. Well, if a religion announces that it wants to build a little structure someplace, suddenly an apartment a block away becomes a mosque, and that then renders that building permit inappropriate. And so the minority religious groups face these constant frustrations.

My work over the years has been particularly focused on stopping the more severe types of abuses. I think these have for the most part declined. The government has become more responsive to sectarian violence, which at times has been horrible, where many people have been beaten by majority religious groups in certain regions of the country. As I mentioned, right now we are facing serious problems with the Baha'is, which are difficult for us to understand; when the court system rules that the Baha'is should be allowed to have marriage licenses and the like, why does the Egyptian Government have to appeal that decision and continue to fight the freedom of Baha'is to have that?

So our road map isn't one that has been laid out quite in that form, but it is one that has been laid out sort of problem by problem.

In Pakistan the issue that we probably raised the most over the years in terms of a serious problem are the antiblasphemy laws. There aren't anticonversion laws in Pakistan, but the antiblasphemy laws have come in for enormous abuse. Some say that virtually none of the people who have been arrested under these laws really did blaspheme. Sometimes it is a rival shopkeeper who wants to put his rival out of business, and so he will accuse him of some slight against Mohammed or the Koran. And this poor man, he can be a Christian or he can be a Muslim sometimes, will wind up spending years in jail as the trials go on and on and on, and sometimes people are sentenced to death.

Thankfully, the Supreme Court as the last resort has generally refused to implement this law. Now, the government, to its credit, has really worked to try to revise the implementation of blasphemy laws, and President Musharraf actually wanted to significantly undo the laws, but was unsuccessful before Parliament in that.

The government also, of course, is very cooperative in maintaining its ban on terrorist organizations and attempting to restrain sectarian violence and pressuring Islamic clergy to work against sectarian violence. So there are good trends that we see in Pakistan, but there are still serious problems there as well.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask you briefly about Saudi Arabia. As you know, I and others on this Committee have repeatedly asked that, as a CPC-designated country, Saudi Arabia get sanctioned pursuant to the remedies in the International Religious Freedom Act. My question is are we seeing any success in that dialogue? I

know that you are waiting to brief us further, but obviously things have deteriorated in many ways. We had a hearing yesterday in our Subcommittee, and it focused on the worsening situation in Somalia, and especially in Mogadishu. And while much of the funding seems to be coming from businessmen for that, the concern about the more radical Wahhabism that Saudi Arabia exports, whether it be in its textbooks or just in its general message of absolute gross intolerance and hatred toward anyone other than people like themselves is very disconcerting now as it takes a further foothold in Somalia.

I would just mention parenthetically Nina Shea in her testimony calls on your Department in its report to do more reporting on the whole area of government, either acquiescent to or supporting Web sites, publications, books that spew out hatred and intolerance.

So a secondary question to that is do you need additional authority? Because I would gladly draft that bill, drop it, and work to get it passed. Or, do you have the existing authority to expand, do a book in the international religion reporting to include that kind of surveillance?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, certainly very serious problems remain in Saudi Arabia that we have to deal with on a regular basis. I and my office have spent a great deal of time working on issues in Saudi Arabia. I have been there four times. We have spent maybe 60 days on the ground in Saudi Arabia since I came into this job meeting with religious groups, minority and majority, and long, numerous meetings with government officials to try to get to the bottom of what is going on there. And certainly some of the problems that you mentioned are very real.

I will say that the government has recognized some of the problems that come from the literature that can be inflammatory and propagate an attitude of hatred toward other groups.

The way that this can fester in other countries, you mentioned Somalia, is something that has needed to be addressed, and the government is taking certain measures. As I said in my remarks, I am seeking right now to find the time on the Subcommittee's schedule where I want to sit down and give a very comprehensive report on our work in Saudi Arabia, what we have done there, and then we will be able to announce this publicly. But I feel the need to discuss it first both on the House and Senate side with Members. And I think there are measures which the Saudis are taking.

In a sense, they, the government there, has awakened, albeit slowly, to the threat of this sort of literature and to this approach to things, since they themselves have experienced the terrorism problem on their own soil, and I think this has helped to create a change in attitude.

Also, King Abdullah since ascending the throne has made a number of meaningful changes and so the trend is a very good one, and of course it has a long way to go.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Ambassador, has anyone in Saudi Arabia been executed for either change of faith; in other words; going from Muslim and converting to Christianity, in recent months or years? And secondly, has anyone been tortured? And I would just again note, the priest that married my wife, Marie and I, 28 years ago, was our head chaplain during Operation Desert Storm and I remember

him telling a story upon his return that he could not display his cross. We were told U.S. soldiers sent to protect Saudi Arabia could not bring their Bibles in and that even Mass on a Sunday morning had to be disguised as a social event because the Mutawah would find it so displeasing to him.

And secondly, on Iraq, very briefly, the International Religious Freedom Commission suggests upwards of 80 new pieces of legislation may be necessary by the Parliament in order to effectuate true religious freedom as they meet. What is your sense on the drafting of those laws?

And finally, what—I have more. I will submit those for the record, and then I will go to Mr. Payne.

Ambassador HANFORD. In terms of death or execution or torture, I have had to work on these cases in past years when I worked up here on the Hill and on these issues, and I am pleased to report that we are not aware of anyone executed for conversion or for their faith in at least 10 or 11 years. And I think the last known public incident of this was quite a bit longer ago than that.

There are problems sometimes with police or, more specifically, the religious police, known as the Mutawah, sometimes taking matters into their own hands and there are a number of positive developments on this front which I look forward to the opportunity, whenever the Subcommittee has an opportunity, to explain these developments to you that I think will provide assurances from now on that these incidents are going to largely go away.

In terms of worship for minority faiths, this is another issue that we have raised repeatedly, that I have been raising ever since I got into this job basically.

The good news is that any given week you have hundreds of thousands of minority people of faith meeting to worship in Saudi Arabia. They meet in homes and places of that sort and in virtually all cases they are unharassed.

Now they are meeting under a certain sense of apprehension. They have to be very careful. But the government has made it clear that they are going to allow this, and they have been, I would say then almost entirely consistent in this. There are occasions where particularly the Mutawah take matters into their own hands but these have now become few and far between.

For example, just last Easter, there were quite a few arrests. This year, there have been very few. And so again I think some of the credit goes to King Abdullah and to the word that he has put out. He is placing a very strong emphasis right now on tolerance and respecting other people's rights to practice their beliefs.

In Iraq, we are aware of the critical importance of getting the implementation legislation right and we are working very hard to see that that happens.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Payne.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much, Ambassador, for being here. Although I didn't hear your testimony I just have a couple of brief questions. Just with the continued violence in Iraq, what effect has that had on minority religious communities there? Just what is the situation in general?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, the violence has affected everyone, minority and majority, and of course the primary violence has been

between the Sunni and the Shiite and this has disrupted worship, mosques have been targeted, worshippers have been targeted and it is tragic to see this happen.

The good news is that many of the religious leaders in the country are determined and have spoken out, such as Ayatollah Sistani, and others are trying to quell this and I think there is a common determination among the large majority of the Iraqi people to respect religious freedom and, once we can get past this period of insurgency, to have a situation in the country that really allows for people of all faiths to be able to practice.

We worked hard with the Iraqi people to get the Constitution in good shape in terms of guaranteeing religious freedom, including for the smaller minority religious groups and, I feel good about the Constitution and feel that as long as this is implemented that we will be in much better shape than we were in the old days. It is true that with all of the violence and pressures that are going on, I have been grieved, as I know have many others, about religious minorities who have fled the country. It is my hope that when things quiet down they will return. But because the numbers have been large, this is something that really, really concerns me.

I hate to see ancient communities of faith leaving their homeland where they have had such a wonderful presence for centuries, and this has been certainly a high priority and a great personal burden of mine as I continue to work on Iraq.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you. In your opinion, which religious minority groups in the Middle East face the most discrimination both at a societal level and a governmental level and, conversely, which countries in the region are noted for promoting tolerance toward religious minorities, just sort of a thumbnail sketch?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, the groups that face the worst treatment would be—of the major religions of the world it would be Christians, I would say, and this differs from country to country.

In some countries, in some cases it is Jews, in other cases Jews have had a very respected place in certain countries where they have been able to flee persecution from elsewhere. And then the Baha'is are especially targeted in some cases because they are viewed as heretical. The Baha'is began in the 1800s in Iran and they are now viewed by the revolutionary government as counter-revolutionary and as sympathetic to the former government of the Shah, and so they are viewed as carrying that baggage and are targeted as a result.

And you see bizarre things happen. This year, for example, they were finally allowed to take entrance exams to be able to attend college and yet every one of their applications had Islam stamped on the application. And because it is a core tenet of Baha'is not to deny their faith, therefore, none of them were able to follow through even as they passed these exams.

So discrimination and persecution takes many forms in country after country after country. But we are trying to take it on as best we can.

In terms of cases where there is comparatively a good degree of religious freedom, Lebanon, Jordan, we have worked with and seen progress and advancements in religious freedom, and United Arab Emirates. I actually have examples in my remarks that I didn't

have a chance to go into, Oman, Bahrain. So there are glimmers of hope in the region.

Mr. PAYNE. Just moving quickly, just had one or two other questions. Nigeria is, as you know, the largest country in Africa and we are now seeing a—where Christians and Muslims have always gotten along fairly well. In many families half would be Muslim, half would be Christian. However, we are seeing more religious intolerance between Christians and Muslims. And I just wonder if you would have any idea about how many people may have died as a result of fighting between Christian and Muslim groups and what seems to be the main issues today, now, that is contributing to the violent acts? And how many people have died as a result of religious violence over the past several years?

It also was interesting that when the cartoon came out, you know, about Mohammed the only country where there were large numbers of deaths was in Nigeria. There was a lot of—you know, there was a lot of protests made throughout the Middle East, as we know. However, there were probably more deaths in Nigeria than in the rest of the world put together. So do you have any fix on what seems to be going on there?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, there is growing tensions and you are right, it is a shame because in past years, and I speak to Nigerians about this, there was a great deal of amity between Muslims and Christians for the most part. You see a growing trend toward radicalism and extremism in many countries of the world right now. This is one reason why we have such a concern for the propagation of literature that incites this.

And in Nigeria, some Muslim groups have become more radicalized and hostile toward Christians, churches are burned down and people are attacked.

And I have—I am afraid I cannot give you a number, I don't have a good sense for that, of how many have been killed.

A lot of this occurs on a community level, not perpetrated by the government but on a community level, but there is a need for various states, some of which are becoming more hostile to Christians and minority faiths, and the central governments to do a better job of policing this and dampening this down because it could become a powder keg.

Mr. PAYNE. One of the problems with their new Constitution—I was there during the writing of the Constitution maybe 10 or 15 years ago when they left from military to civilian rule—was unfortunately they left out the restriction of having religious states; in other words they didn't forbid religious states in the past. In the past it wasn't forbidden either, but no one thought about the fact that it wasn't forbidden in the Constitution. Therefore, some states took up the fact that it wasn't against the Constitution, and so there are, as you know, maybe 8 or 10 states and in Nigeria that have sharia as their law, which is of course very, very serious.

And just on that point, in Sudan in the Comprehensive Peace Accord there was supposed to be the Government of Sudan was supposed to stop imposing sharia on Christians and animists, the people in the south. Do you have any record on what the Government of Sudan is doing as relates to other religions, other than the Islamic religion?

Ambassador HANFORD. Yes. The Comprehensive Peace Accord has been I think largely a success in granting religious freedom for believers in the south. And they are flourishing under that and you are right, under that accord sharia law may not be imposed in the south and the south is able to adopt its own policies in that regard.

In the north, we still struggle over this, how to carve out proper space for non-Muslims to not be subject to all of the provisions of sharia law.

Mr. PAYNE. Of course the Government of Sudan doesn't discriminate much because, as you know, the Darfurians are Muslims and they murder and rape and kill and pilferage them too. So they are just a pariah government which shouldn't even be recognized as a government.

Just finally, there was some anti-Semitism rising in Russia, you know, some desecration of cemeteries and things of that nature, and Putin would say, you know, he is going to look into it, but a little lip service.

What is the situation in Russia as it relates to anti-Semitism and what is the government really doing to try to eliminate it or at least work toward its elimination?

Ambassador HANFORD. I think there have been evidences that the government has been very concerned about the hooliganism and the attacks of anti-Semitism. There was the recent attack on the rabbi that gained a great deal of attention and even from President Putin—we certainly stressed this very strongly. It is still a problem, as it is in many places in Europe, and we will keep raising this vigorously, but I think the government itself is committed to seeing this addressed.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much. I raised the issue with the Duma about 6, 7 months ago and some of the Members were here and they claimed they were going to take a look at it.

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Dr. Boozman.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We all know that there has been persecution going on for centuries throughout the world. You mention that this severe abuse had lessened in Egypt and maybe some shining stars in Lebanon and Jordan, you know places like that.

What are the top two, three, where are the worst places right now?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, the worst place in the world would be North Korea. Now that is in the region, but there is really no religious freedom of any sort. Basically, all religion, all religion is suppressed. There are a few show churches.

Mr. BOOZMAN. So it is purely atheistic?

Ambassador HANFORD. That is right. We don't have a sense for how large the prisoner population is there, the religious prisoner population, but we suspect that it is enormous. Some of the other countries that we designate as countries of particular concern, CPCs, for their severe violations would include Eritrea. On a per capita basis they have maybe the second largest number of religious prisoners, right now maybe about 1,700. The government would argue these people, many of them, are in jail for other reasons, but it is clear that even though they arrest a lot of people for

a lot of things that they have particularly targeted Christian groups in particular.

Iran, which I mentioned earlier, would be among the very worst. Saudi Arabia on a legal basis is certainly among the worst. You have to be a Muslim to be a citizen in that country, and there is an intolerance toward other branches of Islam much less minority faiths.

Burma, China, has been a great frustration in my work in seeing so little progress there in spite of the incredibly high priority that President Bush has personally placed on trying to advance religious freedom in China and I have of course traveled there and impressed—we are given assurances and promises of things that I regard as real breakthroughs. They either state them publicly or post them on web sites in terms of new policies, but they don't get implemented.

And so Vietnam in the past has been a country that I have considered to be one of the worst, but I want to give them credit for turning the corner and now moving toward becoming much better. There are still serious problems in one or two regions of the country.

Mr. BOOZMAN. One thing and again we are all in this Committee because we are interested in this, in trying to push things forward. It is one thing for a sovereign nation to believe as they do and this and that. Who are the biggest exporters of trying to take it out of their sovereign nation, trying to export it to the rest of the world? Who are the most guilty in that respect?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, in the Communist world China over the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been in a sense the biggest exporter of their approach to doing things.

And in the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia, because of the wealth that they have and their ability to fund literature, have been guilty of propagating a lot of literature. The government is very committed to advancing their brand of Islam, the Hanbali or Salafi branch of Sunni Islam, which is arguably the most strict. And while in and of itself this isn't a violation of religious freedom to have this goal, this can breed intolerance toward other branches of Islam and toward other religions. So as this literature has been propagated, I think it has had that effect, whether intentional or unintentional.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Is that lessening, or I mean are they continuing to do that? I guess the problem with that is that you know that branch of Islam doesn't have a whole lot of use for me or you. So are they continuing to do this or is it lessening or—

Ambassador HANFORD. It is lessening, and this has been a great focus of my work. As I mentioned earlier, I will be meeting with the Subcommittee in the next few days, as soon as you get back from recess, to share in detail some of the discussions and results on this very issue, among others. But to sum it up, it is lessening. The Saudis have realized even themselves that this literature can breed hostility which at least many of the leaders do not intend.

Mr. BOOZMAN. But the reality is that it has?

Ambassador HANFORD. And they have experienced the results themselves even with homegrown terrorism, and this has been a bit of an awakening. So measures are being taken to address this,

to revise materials. The process has been slower than any of us would like, but it is sincere. It is perhaps not going to be thoroughly satisfying to all of us. Only time will tell.

There have been improvements. If you look at materials today and compare them to 2 years ago, there have been serious areas of intolerance that have been expunged. And yet there are still very significant problems that remain in the materials.

Mr. BOOZMAN. I guess my constituents, the people of Arkansas, wonder if we would put up with this if they weren't the largest gasoline station in the world.

The other thing is, are we doing the equivalent of Radio Free Europe in that part of the world? Are they doing anything along the lines of advancing religious tolerance in their broadcasts or whatever?

Ambassador HANFORD. Well, yes. We do broadcast in that part of the world. I know that sometimes things that I do and say wind up—I wind up reading about them later, that they were broadcast there.

Mr. BOOZMAN. I guess in traveling in that area and visiting with the different countries, they are really not very impressed with our effort as far as our broadcasts, and I don't know, like I say—it is the equivalent of Radio Free Europe. Like I say, they don't feel it is very effective. They feel like—and again I am not being mad, but in visiting with the folks, you know, that you have the opportunity to, very high level, very high level ranking, at times they are very critical. They don't feel like the message that we are getting out as we do those broadcasts is doing a very good job at all.

Are we sensitive to that? Are we doing a better job? I don't know if that is in your realm or not, but I know that you are very familiar with that part of the world. What is your sense of the job that the broadcaster is doing overall, not just in the religious freedom area?

Ambassador HANFORD. You are right. There are mixed reactions to the broadcasts, as there are mixed reactions to the Western media in general.

Mr. BOOZMAN. The reaction I got was not mixed, it was universal that they are pretty lousy.

Ambassador HANFORD. There is the interesting argument and discussion going on today about the compatibility of democracy and sharia law, for example. There are many Muslims who have aspirations for democracy in their countries, who are pressing for this, even seeing the early stages of it, and yet also have convictions that lead them toward sharia law. And so there are going to be ways in which they don't entirely appreciate or find themselves ready to adopt our version of democracy.

But our efforts are having an effect, they certainly are. And even in places like Saudi Arabia, on many different fronts of reform, although it is happening slowly, you can see this occurring. Just this week the King appointed six women to an Advisory Council for the Sharia, and week after week there are steps which are encouraging.

At the same time, you see the benefits of CNN and Fox News and other channels being broadcast in. These are not restricted in Saudi Arabia, to give another example. They don't appreciate in

many cases the output of Hollywood. Sometimes I find myself having to agree with them on that, frankly. But I think there is a leavening effect that is occurring as a result of the people of countries in the Middle East being able to watch the Western world through the eyes of BBC, CNN and Fox News.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you very much, and I do appreciate your efforts appreciate your work.

Mr. SMITH. Would my friend yield for a moment?

Mr. BOOZMAN. Sure.

Mr. SMITH. On the area of freedom broadcasting we have recently introduced a bill marked up in our Subcommittee called the Global On-Line Freedom Act and while much of the focus was on the hand-in-glove relationship with these companies and China, Saudi Arabia is another country where there is a severe censorship and much of it is religiously based. I would ask you if you would take a look at the bill and maybe offer some comments as we go to Full Committee markup and to the Floor because obviously the government is using it and Saudi Arabia is an Internet restricting country beyond any reasonable doubt. So I would ask you to take a look at it.

Ms. McCollum.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chairman, with great hesitancy, even though I have some questions, I would like to prolong the discussion. I am going to pass because I would like to hear from the other speakers before I get on a plane.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Kaptur.

Ms. KAPTUR. I echo the gentlelady's remarks. I am anxious to hear the witnesses, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. As am I. But I would like to ask you one final question, Mr. Ambassador. Has the U.S. Government raised at a high level with Israeli officials the continuing delays in implementing the fundamental agreement with the Holy See, which was agreed to in 1994, regulating the status of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land?

Ambassador HANFORD. We certainly have. We have regular discussions both with Vatican officials, representatives of the Catholic Church, and with representatives of the Israeli Government to encourage this process along, by which the Vatican is recognizing Israel and by which Israel is recognizing the Catholic Church's role with certain properties and their place in that country. And this has been a tedious and slow process, which at times has been difficult to understand, but yes, we are very much involved in encouraging both parties.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. PAYNE. I just have a quick question. That triggered a concern I had several years ago that in Turkey there was a monastery for the Greek Orthodox Church, and I am wondering—and there was some difficulties. The government was making it hard to have students there. Do you know the situation that is there currently?

Ambassador HANFORD. That continues to be an issue and slowly, you know, this gets addressed. But this has continued to be a frustration and it is not resolved yet.

Mr. PAYNE. You know with Turkey trying to get accession to the EU and you know with the occupation of Cyprus and then also con-

tinuing to have religious discrimination in Turkey, I think that although they, you know, are supposedly a big ally to the U.S., sometimes we need to really tell our so-called allies that they need to behave. We can't have all bad friends, you know. We need friends, but we need friends that have a responsibility to have some standards. We don't need to drift down to where they are. We are all going to be wallowing in the world gutter somewhere.

Ambassador HANFORD. My first meeting in my position as Ambassador-at-Large was with an official from Turkey, the head of religious affairs as I recall, and we keep raising this issue.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much. You know Mr. Payne brings up a good point and we will have other follow-up hearings for other parts of the world. Obviously today we are focusing on the Middle East, but there are, as you pointed out, Turkey, Nigeria, other areas, China certainly, where we need to continue our focus. So we will ask you to come back if you would, Mr. Ambassador.

Ambassador HANFORD. I look forward to it.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much. And I move forward to our next panel, which will consist of Ms. Nina Shea, who has served as Commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, where she is Vice Chair. Ms. Shea has been an international human rights lawyer for 25 years and for the past 10 years has directed the Center For Religious Freedom, a division of Freedom House, America's oldest human rights group. She has authored numerous articles on religious freedom, has spoken out with passion on China, on Sudan and so many other countries, and she has done a piece recently on Iraq's Constitution published in the *Washington Post*.

Ms. Shea, thank you for your being here, and the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF MS. NINA SHEA, VICE CHAIR, U.S.
COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

Ms. SHEA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, and let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify today at this important hearing.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend you, and the Commission on International Religious Freedom commends you in particular for your commitment over many years to the broad array of human rights issues, particularly religious freedom, and you have always been in the forefront of flagging dire situations and today is no different. So thank you very much.

The Commission was asked to testify on religious freedom conditions in five countries, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The Commission has found that three of these countries, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, have governments that commit systematic ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom.

Egypt is a country where widespread discrimination exists, and the grave situation in Iraq is one that requires immediate action and attention by the U.S. Government.

We have found that in the greater Middle East, non-Muslim minorities, often indigenous to their countries, are dwindling, and these include Christians but also Mandaean, Yazidis, Baha'is, Jews, Zoroastrians and also a great deal of sectarian oppression

with the dominant Islamic group or Muslim group suppressing the minority one.

And we are seeing really for the first time in history that the region which has been known for religious diversity is becoming Islamicized. It is not only a loss for these groups but for the region itself. These groups enrich, these minority religious groups enrich the culture and they help to—they have a moderating influence.

I would like to start with our conclusion. In the interest of time I am going to summarize my statement and ask that it be included in the record, the full written statement, as well as more extensive individual chapters from our annual report released last month on the countries that I am addressing.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. SHEA. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, one of the common themes that cuts across each of these countries and several others for that matter is the extent to which a government perpetrates hatred against religious minorities and fosters religious extremism within its society or even beyond its borders through its education system, the official media and other government policies.

To date there has been no systematic reporting by the U.S. Government on this, yet bringing into the public eye information of this sort is very important to urging governments to change their practices or to encourage positive practices already being undertaken by a particular government.

The Commission believes the State Department should describe the nature and extent to which any government or entities funded by that government sponsors activities that explicitly promote religious hatred, intolerance and other human rights violations, including violence. Such a description should include detailed review of any of the following that incite hatred or violence: Textbooks and educational literature in schools, other publications and Web sites of the governments, its ministries or organizations receiving government funding, publications and programs in controlled and semi-official print, radio, television media, and sermons in state controlled places of worship. And one tool that exists for that kind of assessment would be the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report, and I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your support of that recommendation already in today's, this morning's hearing.

I would just like to say a few words about each country. Egypt, starting alphabetically, was included on the Commission's watch list. It has been since 2002. We found that there is discrimination, intolerance and other human rights violations that affect a broad spectrum of Egyptian society, including the Coptic Orthodox Christians, the Baha'is, and Muslims who do not adhere to the state favored interpretation of Sunni Islam.

All religious minority groups cite widespread interference, harassment and constant surveillance by Egyptian State Security Services, the government entity that oversees religious affairs in Egypt. Moreover, anti-Semitic rhetoric continues unabated in the state controlled and in the semi-official media and education system.

Regarding the Coptic Christians, there have been knife attacks on Christian worshippers at three churches in Alexandria in April,

leaving an elderly man dead and up to 16 others wounded. Although the government claimed that a mentally disturbed man was the lone perpetrator, there are evidence that these attacks were religiously motivated. Three days of rioting followed the attacks leaving one Muslim killed and almost 40 injured.

Christians were also targets of the extremists earlier this year in Luxor, where more than a dozen were injured, and last October in Alexandria where three were killed during clashes. And of course the Al-Kosheh massacre at the turn of the millennium in 2000 is where 20 Christians were killed. There has never been justice in that case even though the government did promise that to the world and to the Commission in particular during a visit there.

Permits to build and repair non-Muslim houses of worship languish under restrictive rules.

In 1960, a Presidential decree skipped Baha'is' legal recognizing and as a result leaving the community of 2,000 with no valid identity documents which they need to comply with the law which requires all Egyptians to possess a valid identity card and for government services, including education.

Human rights groups have noted a rise in Islamic extremism and tied it to the government's human rights practices.

It is clear that a climate for greater respect for compliance with Egypt's international human rights obligations is vital to the improvement of human rights for the religious minorities, and to that end the Commission recommends that the U.S. Government should establish a timetable for implementation of political and human rights reforms. If deadlines are not met, the U.S. Government should reconsider the appropriate allocation of its assistance to the Egyptian Government, direct U.S. assistance to Egyptian human rights, and other civil society groups should continue without vetting by the Egyptian Government.

In Iran, the government's poor religious freedom record deteriorated even further especially for religious minorities, and for Baha'is in particular. All minority groups are facing intensified harassment, detention, arrests and imprisonment. Repression has risen to a level not seen since the years immediately following the 1979 revolution.

The President's repeated threats to destroy Israel and denials of the Holocaust have intensified fears among Iran's Jewish community. Dissident Muslims and political reformers continue to be put in prison on criminal charges of blasphemy and criticizing the nature of the Islamic regime.

Since the next panelist will discuss more on the Baha'is in Iran, I will just again reiterate that more than 120 Baha'is have been arbitrarily arrested since early 2005 and in December, last December, a Baha'i who had been jailed for more than 10 years on charges of apostasy died in prison under mysterious circumstances.

Christians have also been subject to harassment and their numbers have plummeted in Iran since the revolution. An evangelical pastor, Hamid Pourmand, remains in prison on charges of apostasy even after being acquitted in November 2005 by an Islamic court.

Turning to Iraq, amid the widely publicized cycle of Sunni-Shiite sectarian violence in Iraq, non-Muslim religious minorities continue to suffer a disproportionate burden of violent attacks and other

human rights abuses. These minorities, including Christian Iraqis, Yazidis and Sabeian Mandaeans, have been forced to fend for themselves in a continuing climate of impunity and remain particularly vulnerable given their lack of any tribal or militia structure to provide for their security.

In the face of this violence, members of these fragile communities continue to flee the country in an exodus that may mean the end in the presence in Iraq of ancient Christian and other religious minorities, communities that have lived in these same lands for 2,000 years.

Recently the UN reported, “an explosion of Islamist extremist movements and militias which target, among others, members of religious communities,” and concluded that religious minorities “have become the regular victims of discrimination, harassment and at times persecution with instruments ranging from intimidation to murder, and that members of the Christian minority appear to be particularly targeted.”

As you already know, during the past 2 years the indigenous ancient Iraqi Christian community repeatedly has been the target of coordinated bombing attacks, kidnappings, murders, and there is particular concern that in the Kurdistan region they have been discriminated against and driven off of their land.

And I just like to say a comment, I have been in my personal capacity, my capacity as Director of the Freedom House Center for Religious Freedom, have been speaking with USAID officials and learned that the problem that is exacerbating the exodus of Christians from the Kurdistan region—it is estimated that maybe a third, as many as a third of the Christian population in Iraq live in Kurdistan—has been caused by U.S. reconstruction policies. U.S. Government is involved in the mega projects of bringing on electric power and water systems in Kurdistan, and once they complete these major projects of infrastructure they walk away. The U.S. just sort of walks away without nary a glance backward, without caring or being sensitive to the fact that religious minorities live in ethnic enclaves and that their villages are not being hooked up by the ruling powers so that in Kurdistan the Kurdish Government is not hooking up to—well, is hooking up in a discriminatory fashion villages to power grids and to water and sewage lines. The Christian villages and Mandaean villages and the Yazidi villages are suffering. They are without power. They are without water and they must then leave. The U.S. could do something about that.

We also, the Commission is concerned about the Constitution. We are not as sanguine as the Ambassador. We feel that there are problems as currently drafted and in covering that with the religiously motivated sectarian violence underscores the need for amendments that would clarify and strengthen human rights as well as the promotion of implementing legislation to protect and enforce these rights.

There is ambiguities in the Constitution regarding the rights. They may be negated by provisions such as a repugnancy clause saying that no law can be repugnant to Islam but depending on how that is interpreted the Supreme Court under the Constitution is to include judges that need not have any kind of grounding in civil law.

Regarding Pakistan, the religious freedom problems in Pakistan come from two sources. First, there is a continued problem related to religious extremism and resulting violence. Pakistani Government officials do not provide adequate protection from societal violence to members of the religious minority communities, including Shi'a, Ahmadi, Hindu and Christians. With some exceptions perpetrators of attacks on minorities are seldom brought to justice.

Second, there is the problem of discriminatory legislation and that is deliberate government policies because of the laws targeting the Ahmadi community, which numbers between 3 and 4 million. In Pakistan Ahmadis are prevented by law from engaging in the full practice of their faith. It is illegal for Ahmadis to preach in public, to seek converts and to produce, publish and disseminate their religious materials. They have been arrested and put in prisons for terms of 3 years for all of the above acts and are reportedly subject to ill treatment from prison authorities and fellow prisoners. Blasphemy allegations, which are often pursued as personal vendettas, result in the lengthy detention of and sometimes violence against Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus and members of other religious minorities as well as Muslims on account of their religious beliefs.

It is compounded by the lack of due process involved in these proceedings. Several accused under blasphemy laws have been attacked, even killed by vigilantes, including while in police custody. Therefore, the fact that the Supreme Court has not carried through in these cases does not mean that these blasphemy laws are not a serious human rights problem because of vigilantes and fanatics within the communities who do carry them out.

Finally, Saudi Arabia, the government continues to enforce vigorously its ban on all forms of public religious expression other than the government's interpretation and enforcement of the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam. Members of the Shi'a and other non-Sunni communities as well as nonconforming Sunnis are subject to government restrictions on government religious practices and official discrimination in numerous areas, particularly in government employment.

In past years prominent Shi'a cleric and religious scholars were arrested and detained without charge for religious views. Some were reportedly beaten and otherwise ill treated. Recent reports indicate that some of these Shi'a clerics have been released, but the current status of a number of others remains unknown.

There is also a continuing pattern of punishment and abuse of Christians and non-Muslim foreigners for private religious practice in Saudi Arabia which often results in harassment, arrests and abuse by the Mutawah.

Furthermore, the government continues to be linked to financing activities throughout the world that support extreme religious intolerance, hatred and in some cases violence toward non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims. In May, my own organization, the Center For Religious Freedom and Freedom House released an analysis of a dozen religious textbooks from the most recent school year's curriculum in Saudi Arabia and found that the Ministry of Education continues to teach religious hatred and that the violence to spread the faith is a religious obligation.

While the Saudi Ambassador to the United States has acknowledged the problem and admitted that the reform of the Saudi education is going slowly because it is a massive undertaking, others in the government such as Saudi Interior Minister Prince Naif refuted the study and said publicly that Saudi textbooks are progressive and free of any kind of Islamist extremist ideology. So that while apparently the Ambassador's comments were directed to a U.S. audience, the Interior Minister's comments were for a Saudi one as they were made at a graduation ceremony in a university in Riyadh, contradictory messages for different audiences.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my statement. Thank you, very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Shea follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. NINA SHEA, VICE CHAIR, U.S. COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify today at this important hearing. I plan to summarize the Commission's testimony in my oral remarks, but would like to request that my written statement be included in the record, as well as more extensive individual chapters from our Annual Report, released last month, on each of the countries I will speak about today.

The Commission was asked to testify today on religious freedom conditions in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia and to offer recommendations for U.S. policy. Each of the five countries I will speak about poses serious and varied challenges for freedom of religion or belief. The Commission has found that three of the countries—Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia—have governments that commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. Egypt is a country where widespread discrimination exists, and the grave situation in Iraq is one that requires immediate action and attention by the U.S. government.

With the exception of Iran, all of these countries are close partners with the United States in the war on terror and on maintaining regional stability. One way the Administration has determined to combat terrorism and to achieve stability in the region is to promote effective democracies. As the President stated in his 2006 National Security Strategy, "Because democracies are the most responsible members of the international system, promoting democracy is the most effective long-term measure for strengthening international stability; reducing regional conflicts; countering terrorism and terror-supporting extremism; and extending peace and prosperity." The Commission agrees that a demonstrated U.S. commitment to promoting human rights, including religious freedom, in the five countries being examined here is essential to any meaningful advances in the war on terrorism and to successes in the global promotion of democracy.

Due to time constraints, I will be able to highlight only some of our most serious religious freedom concerns and discuss just a few of our key policy recommendations for each country. Let me start, in alphabetical order, with Egypt.

EGYPT

The Commission, which has included Egypt on its Watch List since 2002, has found that discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations affect a broad spectrum of Egyptian society, including Coptic Orthodox Christians, Baha'is, and Muslims who do not adhere to the state-favored interpretation of Sunni Islam. All religious minority groups cite widespread interference, harassment, and constant surveillance by Egyptian State Security Services—the government entity that oversees religious affairs in Egypt. Moreover, anti-Semitic rhetoric continues unabated in the state-controlled and semi-official media and education system.

Relations between Egypt's Muslims and Christians are increasingly strained. Knife attacks on Christian worshippers at three churches in Alexandria in April left an elderly man dead and up to 16 others wounded. Although the government claimed that a mentally disturbed man was the lone perpetrator, there is evidence that these attacks were religiously motivated. Three days of rioting followed the attacks, leaving one Muslim killed and almost 40 injured. Christians were also targets of extremists earlier this year near Luxor, where more than a dozen were injured, and last October in Alexandria, where three were killed during clashes.

Permits to build or repair non-Muslim houses of worship languish under restrictive rules. In December, President Mubarak announced he was easing restrictions on the maintenance of churches, which theoretically means approvals can be given at the local level. Yet, there are no signs so far that the situation has improved.

Baha'is, who have been banned from practicing their religion in Egypt for decades, continue to face severe challenges. A 1960 Presidential decree stripped Baha'is of legal recognition and as a result, many in the community of about 2,000 have no valid identity documents, which they need to comply with a law requiring all Egyptians to possess a valid identity card and for government services, including education. In April, Baha'is won the right in court to obtain identity documents without having to falsify their religious affiliation. But the victory was short-lived. After the Interior Ministry appealed the ruling on advice from religious authorities at Al-Azhar University, a higher court suspended the original verdict last month, leaving the Baha'i community in limbo until the Supreme Administrative Court rules on the appeal in September.

Human rights groups inside the country continue to be concerned that Islamic extremism is advancing in Egypt with detrimental effects on the prospects for democratic reform, religious tolerance, and the rights of women and girls and members of religious minorities. Some believe that the government is not acting to its fullest ability to counteract this problem, especially in the areas of public education and the media, where the extremist influence is growing.

President Bush repeatedly has urged the Egyptian government to "show the way toward democracy in the Middle East," yet the Mubarak government has not made significant headway on democratic reform. In fact, there has been backsliding on several human rights, including religious freedom, in recent weeks and months.

A climate of greater respect for and compliance with Egypt's international human rights obligations is vital to improvement of its actions related to freedom of religion and treatment of religious minorities. To that end, the Commission recommends that:

- the U.S. government should establish a timetable for implementation of political and human rights reforms. If deadlines are not met, the U.S. government should re-consider the appropriate allocation of its assistance to the Egyptian government. Direct U.S. assistance to Egyptian human rights and other civil society groups should continue, without vetting by the Egyptian government.

High on the list of these reform benchmarks has to be that the Egyptian government removes *de facto* responsibility for religious affairs from the state security services with the exception of cases involving violence or the advocacy of violence.

In the near future, the Commission plans to reassess the overall situation in Egypt and whether or not conditions warrant raising Egypt to the status of a "country of particular concern," or CPC, from its current Watch List designation.

IRAN

Over the past year, the Iranian government's poor religious freedom record deteriorated, especially for religious minorities and for Baha'is in particular. All minority groups are facing intensified harassment, detention, arrests, and imprisonment. Repression has risen to a level not seen since the years immediately following the 1979 revolution. President Ahmadinejad's repeated threats to destroy Israel and denials of the Holocaust have intensified fears among Iran's Jewish community. Dissident Muslims and political reformers continue to be imprisoned on criminal charges of blasphemy and criticizing the nature of the Islamic regime.

Over the years, hundreds of prominent Muslim activists and dissidents from among the Shi'a majority advocating political reform have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms by the Revolutionary Court, ostensibly on charges of seeking to overthrow the Islamic system in Iran. Reformists and journalists are regularly tried under current press laws and the Penal Code on charges of "insulting Islam," criticizing the Islamic Republic, and publishing materials that deviate from Islamic standards. Muslim minorities also face repression. Iranian Sunni leaders have reported widespread abuses and restrictions on their religious practice and the Sufi community is regularly intimidated and harassed by intelligence and security services and report widespread official discrimination.

In recent months, dozens of Baha'is have been arrested, detained, and interrogated before being released. In some cases, they have spent weeks or months in detention without being charged with any offense. In December 2005, Zabihullah Mahrami, a Baha'i who had been jailed for more than 10 years on charges of apostasy, died in prison under mysterious circumstances. In March 2006, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief exposed a confidential October 2005

letter from the Iranian Chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces to several Iranian government agencies directing these entities to collect information on all members of the Baha'i community in Iran and to monitor their activities. Just last month, 54 Baha'is, mostly young females in their teens and 20s, were arrested in Shiraz while teaching underprivileged children non-religious subjects such as math and science. More than 120 Baha'is have been arbitrarily arrested since early 2005.

Christians in Iran continue to be subject to harassment, arrests, close surveillance, and imprisonment; many are reported to have fled the country. In the past 15 years, numerous Christians reportedly have been killed at the hands of government authorities and more than a dozen are reported missing or "disappeared." An evangelical pastor, Hamid Pourmand, remains in prison on charges of apostasy even after being acquitted in November 2005 by an Islamic court. Pourmand has been serving the balance of a three-year sentence handed down by a separate military court in February 2005. Furthermore, official policies promoting anti-Semitism are on the rise in Iran, though members of the Jewish community have always been singled out on the basis of "ties to Israel," whether real or perceived. Official government discrimination against Jews continues to be pervasive.

The government's monopoly on and enforcement of the official interpretation of Islam negatively affect the human rights of women in Iran, including their right to freedoms of movement, association, thought, conscience, and religion, and freedom from coercion in matters of religion or belief.

Since 1999, the State Department has designated Iran as a CPC. The Commission continues to recommend that Iran remain a CPC for severe religious freedom violations. In addition, the Commission recommends that the U.S. government should:

- at the highest levels, vigorously speak out publicly about the deteriorating conditions for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in Iran, including drawing attention to specific cases where severe violations have occurred, demonstrating that the U.S. government will not tolerate religious freedom abuses and is very closely monitoring developments in each individual case;
- ensure that new funding budgeted to promote democracy and human rights in Iran includes support for initiatives promoting freedom of religion or belief, as well as ways to promote rule of law programs that specifically seek to protect religious minorities in Iran; and
- increase funding for U.S. public diplomacy entities, such as Voice of America and Radio Farda, and develop new programming solely focusing on the situation of human rights—including the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief—in Iran.

IRAQ

Amid the widely-publicized cycle of Sunni-Shi'a sectarian violence in Iraq, non-Muslim religious minorities continue to suffer a disproportionate burden of violent attacks and other human rights abuses. These minority communities, including Christian Iraqis, Yazidis, and Sabeen Mandaeans, have been forced to fend for themselves in a continuing climate of impunity, and they remain particularly vulnerable given their lack of any tribal or militia structure to provide for their security.

In the face of this violence, members of these fragile communities continue to flee the country in an exodus that may mean the end of the presence in Iraq of ancient Christian and other religious minority communities that have lived on those same lands for 2,000 years.¹ Recently, the UN reported on "an explosion of Islamist extremist movements and militias which target, among others, members of religious minorities," and concluded that religious minorities "have become the regular victims of discrimination, harassment, and at times persecution, with incidents ranging from intimidation . . . [to] murder," and that "members of the Christian minority . . . appear to be particularly targeted."²

As you already know, during the past two years, the indigenous, ancient Iraqi Christian community repeatedly has been the target of coordinated bombing attacks. This constant threat of violence has forced many worshippers to cease attending religious services or participate in religious events. Reports also alleged that the

¹ According to the UNHCR, "Iraqi Christians continue to arrive in Syria and Jordan, however, in smaller numbers than in 2004." UNHCR, *Guidelines Relating to the Eligibility of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers* (October, 2005), p. 9 (<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/publ/opedoc.pdf?tbl=RSDLEGAL&id=4354e3594&page=publ>).

² *Ibid.*

Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has engaged in discriminatory behavior against religious minorities, including confiscation of ChaldoAssyrian property.³

Islamic extremist elements also continue to target individual members of the Sabeian Mandaean community, solely on the basis of their religious belief. In a number of instances, attackers reportedly attempted forcibly to convert their victims before murdering them, sometimes going so far as to leave the victims' valuables behind to underscore the religious motivation for their acts.

In the past year, religiously motivated attacks on women, including non-Muslim women, continued, including acid attacks, kidnappings, and killings. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief reported that certain religious groups were issuing death threats against women pursuing advocacy or other political work.⁴ Women in particular are being forced to contend with the unlawful imposition of Islamic laws and principles by grassroots vigilante groups, as well as by the operation of illegal courts that seek to impose an extremist version of Islamic law on all Iraqis, regardless of their beliefs. The UN Special Rapporteur also concluded that the imposition of religious dress requirements in some academic institutions "led to a reduction in the number of girls and women attending schools and universities." This manner of dress was not forced, required, or even expected of women under the previous regime.

With respect to Iraq's new constitution, the Commission believes that ambiguous and potentially problematic provisions, as currently drafted, coupled with ongoing religiously-motivated sectarian violence, underscore the need for amendments that would clarify and strengthen human rights, as well as the promotion of implementing legislation to protect and enforce these rights. Such legislation should safeguard the right of every person to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, as well as establish an impartial and objective judiciary. In the face of Iraq's history of tyranny and the difficult efforts by those Iraqis who continue to support pluralism and freedom, these concerns are not merely theoretical. They are essential for genuine democracy and peace.

The Commission appreciates that significant security challenges continue to confront Iraq during its political transition. We also feel strongly that human rights protections—including safeguards for the individual right to freedom of religion or belief—represent a necessary component for successfully resolving these challenges. Therefore, the Commission recommends that:

- the State Department should immediately appoint and dispatch a senior Foreign Service officer to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to serve as the lead human rights official in Iraq, as previously endorsed by the Conference Report of the 2006 Science, State, Justice, Commerce, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act;
- Congress should urge the Administration to speak out at the highest level against religiously motivated violence, including violence targeting women and members of religious minorities; and, in cooperation with Iraqi law enforcement, take steps to: (a) enhance security at places of worship, particularly in areas where religious minorities are known to be at risk, and (b) locate and shut down illegal courts unlawfully imposing an extremist version of Islamic law; and
- Congress should direct unobligated Iraq reconstruction funds to deploy a group of human rights experts for consultations with the Iraqi Council of Representatives and the constitutional amendment committee, and to assist with legal drafting and implementation matters related to strengthening human rights provisions, including freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief.
- reconstruction and other funds should be proportionally allocated to ChaldoAssyrian communities, and their use determined by independent ChaldoAssyrian national and town civic representatives. Direct lines of input should be established with these independent ChaldoAssyrian civic structures through the allocation process of the Iraqi central government in Baghdad, separate from the Kurdish Regional Government."

³ U.S. Department of State, *2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

⁴ UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, "Addendum: Summary of Cases Transmitted to Governments and Replies Received," March 27, 2006, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2006/5/Add.1, p. 50.

PAKISTAN

The religious freedom problems in Pakistan come from two sources. First, there is the continued problem related to religious extremism and resulting violence. Pakistani government officials do not provide adequate protections from societal violence to members of the religious minority communities, including Shi'as, Ahmadis, Hindus, and Christians. With some exceptions, perpetrators of attacks on minorities are seldom brought to justice.

Second, there is the problem of discriminatory legislation—i.e., deliberate government policies. Because of the laws targeting the Ahmadi community, which numbers between 3 and 4 million in Pakistan, Ahmadis are prevented by law from engaging in the full practice of their faith. Among other restrictions, it is illegal for Ahmadis to preach in public, to seek converts, or to produce, publish, and disseminate their religious materials. Ahmadis have been arrested and imprisoned for terms of up to three years for all of the above acts, and they are reportedly subject to ill treatment from prison authorities and fellow prisoners. Blasphemy allegations, which are often false, result in the lengthy detention of, and sometimes violence against, Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, and members of other religious minorities, as well as Muslims on account of their religious beliefs. The negative impact of the blasphemy laws is further compounded by the lack of due process involved in these proceedings. Several accused under the blasphemy laws have been attacked, even killed, by vigilantes, including while in police custody.

Many religious schools, or madrassas, in Pakistan provide ongoing ideological training and motivation to those who take part in violence targeting religious minorities in Pakistan and abroad. In mid-2005, the government of Pakistan renewed its effort to require all madrassas to register with the government. By year's end, and despite considerable outcry from some militant groups, most of the religious schools had registered. It remains unclear, however, whether these belated efforts to curb extremism through reform of the country's Islamic religious schools will prove effective. Moreover, these efforts do not adequately address the much wider problem of religious extremism in Pakistan and the continued strength of militant groups. It is not only Pakistan's religious schools that are cause for concern, however. The Commission is also concerned about the country's public school curriculum, which, according to the State Department, includes "derogatory remarks against minority religions, particularly Hindus and Jews," and the more general teaching that religious intolerance is acceptable.

And finally, Pakistan's Hudood Ordinances, which apply to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, provide for harsh punishments, such as amputation and death by stoning, for violations of Islamic law. Women are particularly harshly affected by these laws: in October 2003, the National Commission on the Status of Women in Pakistan issued a report on the Hudood Ordinances that stated that as many as 88 percent of women prisoners, many of them rape victims, are serving time in prison for violating these decrees.

These religious freedom concerns continue amid the wider problem of the lack of democracy in Pakistan, an obstacle that, frankly speaking, the current government has done little to address. The absence of any meaningful democratic reform has been exacerbated by the Pakistani government's political alliance with militant religious parties, which has served to strengthen these groups and give them influence in the country's affairs disproportionate to their support among the Pakistani people.

In light of these persistent, serious concerns, the Commission continues to recommend that Pakistan be designated a CPC for severe religious freedom violations. In addition, the Commission recommends to the U.S. government that it urge the government of Pakistan to:

- make more serious efforts to combat Islamic extremism in that country and prevent sectarian violence;
- decriminalize blasphemy and, until such a time as that is possible, to implement procedural changes to the blasphemy laws that will reduce and ultimately eliminate their abuse; and
- rescind the laws targeting Ahmadis, which effectively violate their right to freedom of religion guaranteed in numerous international documents.

SAUDI ARABIA

The government of Saudi Arabia continues to enforce vigorously its ban on all forms of public religious expression other than the government's interpretation and enforcement of the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam. Members of the Shi'a and other non-Sunni communities, as well as non-conforming Sunnis, are subject to govern-

ment restrictions on public religious practices and official discrimination in numerous areas, particularly in government employment. In past years, prominent Shi'a clerics and religious scholars were arrested and detained without charge for their religious views; some were reportedly beaten or otherwise ill-treated. Recent reports indicate that some of these Shi'a clerics have been released, but the current status of a number of others remains unknown.

Criminal charges of apostasy, blasphemy, and criticizing the nature of the regime are used by the Saudi government to suppress discussion and debate and silence dissidents. Promoters of political and human rights reforms, as well as those seeking to debate the appropriate role of religion in relation to the state, its laws, and society, are typically the target of such charges. For example, in April, a Saudi journalist was arrested and detained by Saudi authorities for almost two weeks for "denigrating Islamic beliefs" and criticizing the Saudi government's strict interpretations of Islam. In November 2005, a Saudi high school teacher, accused for discussing topics such as the Bible, Judaism, and the causes of terrorism, was tried on charges of blasphemy and insulting Islam and sentenced to three years in prison and 750 lashes. Although he was pardoned by King Abdullah in December 2005, he nevertheless lost his job and suffered other repercussions.

There is also a continuing pattern of punishment and abuse of non-Muslim foreigners for private religious practice in Saudi Arabia, which often results in harassment, arrests, and abuse by the *mutawaa*, or religious police. Furthermore, the government continues to be linked to financing activities throughout the world that support extreme religious intolerance, hatred, and, in some cases, violence toward non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims.

In May, the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House, of which I, in my own professional capacity, am director, released an analysis of a dozen religious and other textbooks from the most recent school year's curriculum in Saudi Arabia and found that religious intolerance and hatred toward all "unbelievers" remains pervasive. The response to this report unfortunately reflects a pattern that we have seen before: contradictory messages from Saudi officials and an absence of tangible improvements. Saudi Ambassador to the United States Prince Turki al-Faisal, while acknowledging the problem and admitting that reform of the Saudi education system is a "massive undertaking," also said that the "Saudi government has worked diligently during the last five years to overhaul its education system, which includes textbooks, teacher training, and the introduction of new teaching methods." However, just two weeks ago, Saudi Interior Minister Prince Naif refuted the study and said publicly that Saudi textbooks are "progressive" and free of any kind of extremist ideology. Apparently, Ambassador Turki's comments were directed at a U.S. audience, while Prince Naif's comments were for a Saudi one, as they were made at a graduation ceremony of a university in Riyadh—contradictory messages for different audiences.

Moreover, the government's monopoly on the interpretation of Islam and other violations of freedom of religion adversely affect the human rights of women in Saudi Arabia, including freedom of speech, movement, association, and religion, freedom from coercion, access to education, and full equality before the law.

In September 2004, the State Department for the first time followed the Commission's recommendation and designated Saudi Arabia a "country of particular concern," or CPC. In September 2005, one year after the designation of Saudi Arabia, Secretary Rice approved a temporary 180-day waiver of further action, as a consequence of CPC designation, to allow for continued diplomatic discussions with the Saudi government and "to further the purposes of the International Religious Freedom Act." At that time, the Commission stated that the U.S. government should use the 180-day extension to directly engage the Saudi government to achieve demonstrable progress by the end of that period of time. The waiver expired in late March 2006.

In the absence of such progress to date, and in accordance with IRFA, the Commission recommends that the U.S. government should:

- stop approving the export to Saudi Arabia of items such as handcuffs, leg irons, and shackles, which could be used by some agencies of the Saudi government to perpetrate human rights violations, such as torture; and
- bar those Saudi government officials from entry into the United States who are responsible for severe religious freedom violations or for propagating a religiously intolerant, hate-filled ideology throughout the globe.

Since its inception, the Commission has recommended, and continues to recommend, that Saudi Arabia be designated a CPC. Earlier this month, a State Department spokesman said that it will soon announce publicly the results of extensive discussions with the Saudi government on efforts to improve religious freedom

conditions in that country. The Commission believes that if an agreement is announced, it should be closely and transparently monitored and that the State Department should report to Congress quarterly on the progress of such an agreement's implementation.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, one of the common themes that cuts across each of these countries, and several others for that matter, is the extent to which a government perpetuates hatred against religious minorities and fosters religious extremism within its society or even beyond its borders through its education system, the official media, and other government policies. To date, there has been no systematic reporting on this by the U.S. government. Yet bringing into the public eye information of this sort is very important to urging governments to change their practices or to encourage positive practices already being undertaken by a particular government.

The Commission believes that the State Department should describe the nature and extent to which any government, or entities funded by that government, sponsors activities that explicitly promote religious hatred, intolerance, and other human rights violations, including violence. Such a description should include a detailed review of any of the following that incite hate or violence: 1) textbooks and educational literature in schools; 2) other publications and Websites of the government, its ministries, or organizations receiving government funding; 3) publications and programs of state-controlled and semi-official print, radio, and television media; and 4) sermons in state-controlled places of worship. One tool that already exists which could include this kind of assessment would be the State Department's *International Religious Freedom Report*.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to share with you the Commission's views and recommendations. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the Congress to advance in U.S. policy respect for the freedom of religion or belief.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing and inviting the Commission to testify. I am now happy to answer any questions that you may have regarding my oral or written statements.

Mr. SMITH. Mrs. Shea, thank you very much and I hope you would convey to your fellow commissioners how deeply appreciated the Commission's work is. It is doing I think even more than what many of us thought when we crafted the legislation that created it. You have been truly an independent voice, but also a very comprehensive voice as your testimony again today clearly shows and exhibits.

Ms. SHEA. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you just a few questions, first on the issue of Father Firas, who you probably heard the exchange that I had before with Ambassador Hanford. My first question is, generally, has the Commission looked into the issues relating to the security fence or wall and how they are impacting religious belief?

And also the impact it is having on individuals obviously of religion or faith. Father Firas points out the loss of water and olive trees remains a significant problem and points out, and I think this is very telling, that an olive tree produces \$200 of profit per person per season. The Israeli Government has offered to buy or compensate for each tree destroyed—and there have been some 4,000 trees destroyed already—yet they are offering a miserly \$15 each and that leads to a destruction of a community, which is obviously what this hearing is all about.

But has the issue of the fence been looked at and its impact?

Ms. SHEA. Mr. Chairman, the Commission follows very clearly events in the Middle East and deplores the violence and loss of life among both Israelis and Palestinians. The U.S. Government is working at the highest levels to create conditions for peace. So the problem is hardly being ignored.

The Commission has publicly deplored attacks on innocent civilians and home sites and condemns the use of religious rhetoric to justify such attacks. We will continue to monitor the situation in the region and if we believe we can make a contribution to U.S. policy we will not hesitate to speak out.

Mr. SMITH. If you could take back to the Commission at least a request I would make to look into the impact the fence is having.

Again I think the President summed it up, we fully understand, Father Firas does so as well, the need for Israeli security. And I take a backseat to no one in underscoring my concern for that as well. The suicide bombers and the fact that Hamas even before their most recent political ascendancy pretty much controlled what UNRA was doing and certainly would bring in, I offered an amendment on it not so long ago, to focus on the textbooks issue which was rife with anti-Semitic and anti-Israel teaching. So it is an issue. But the other side of that coin is obviously other victims, new people being victimized as a result of a fence that may deviate from a security focus to something other than that. So I would ask you to take a look at it if you would.

Ms. SHEA. Mr. Chairman, I will take your message back. I will also say that we are also concerned about the destruction of another Christian community, and that is one we have direct control over and that is Iraq. And again as the infrastructure, political reconstruction of Iraq takes place, the infrastructure is not being built or carried out in a way that ensures that religious minorities are benefiting from it, and as a result I would even say that they are being ethnically cleansed through it.

So I would also ask you to take a look at that issue.

Mr. SMITH. I appreciate that. As a matter of fact, I took your reporting to a meeting with Secretary Rice and many of us conveyed the concern that, perhaps unwitting, the outcome of our reconstruction has been to the detriment of the religious, particularly the Christian, community.

I will raise that myself again with renewed fervor, but we took your Commission's findings on that. So I thank you for that.

Ms. SHEA. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask you one final question with regards to Egypt and Pakistan. You have called for Pakistan to be designated a CPC country and Egypt a watch list. What minimum concrete improvements in religious freedom should we condition our assistance on, because to both nations we do provide considerable largess?

Ms. SHEA. Some of the areas of the Egyptian Government the United States should be looking at in determining aid should be whether Egypt repeals the state of emergency in existence since 1981 to allow for the full consolidation of rule of law.

The educational textbooks, again, whether they promote hatred or intolerance or violence, taking appropriate steps to punish acts of anti-Semitism, whether Coptic Christians can build their churches without serious impediment, whether the Baha'is would have their documentation that they need to survive in Egypt.

In Pakistan a deep concern of course is the blasphemy laws that are being used really to carry out personal vendettas and intimi-

date and silence people and also the restrictions, the legal restrictions, on the Ahmadis to practice their faith.

Mr. SMITH. You heard me earlier ask Ambassador Hanford to take a look at our Global On-Line Freedom Act, since the Internet is becoming the newest way of spewing out hatred—whether it be anti-Semitic or anti Christian or just anti anything—if the Commission would look at it as well, and see if it might be helpful to report on it in terms of your support, or any recommendations for language.

You mentioned that the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religious Belief in 2006 reported on a confidential armed forces memo from October 2005 detailing what looks like a further crack-down on the Baha'i. What leverage do you think we might have with Iran and could you speak to that report by the UN Rapporteur?

And adding to that, the Human Rights Council has now begun its work. Many of us were gravely disappointed that it looks like a reiteration of the Human Rights Commission, which was extremely ineffective, rife with hypocrisy, and yet at times they did some good. The Rapporteur is a little different. They do try to do some serious reporting but then what comes of it? Is there any chance that religious freedom will be an issue that the Human Rights Council takes seriously?

Ms. SHEA. To answer your questions about Iran, the Commission recommends that the U.S. ensure that new funding budgeted to promote democracy and human rights in Iran including support for initiatives promoting freedom of religion or belief as well as ways to promote rule of law programs that specifically seek to protect religious minorities in Iran, and to increase funding for U.S. public diplomacy entities such as the Voice of America and Radio Farda and develop new programming fully focusing on the situation of human rights and including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief in Iran.

The Council, as you stated, the Special Rapporteurs of the former Human Rights Commission have often been very, very helpful and good. I know I worked very closely with Gaspar Biro on Sudan and I am sure Congressman Payne remembers those reports. They were exemplary. And that is something that should be preserved and I hope that the United States will fund that aspect of it, will continue to fund it and will find a way to work in the Council because our influence is diminished by not being there, but also by the fact that there are rogue governments still members of the Council.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Payne.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you. It is good to see you again, Ms. Shea, and your work continues on through the years. I didn't know it was that long, I don't know if the Chairman does you any service by giving the number of years. But you only look 25.

Ms. SHEA. Thank you.

Mr. PAYNE. Let me ask once again about Egypt. You know we have a lot of problems around the world. But there are places that we do a lot to support the government and to support the living conditions and Egypt of course being one of those, and the incident that occurred between authorities in Egypt and South Sudanese who are there, refugees, living in a park area, which they were just

met brutally by the police forces and there were some deaths and children and women were beaten.

I don't know whether you can consider this religious per se however.

Did you all have an opportunity to look at that at all when it occurred and their government's response?

Ms. SHEA. Yes. Mr. Payne, I remember that incident and I believe it was in December, January of this year. It was very tragic. There were a number of deaths in a brutal way as the police moved in to try to deport them on the spot back to Sudan from where they had fled.

The Commission did look into it at the time, and I will have to get back to you on what we found. Thank you.

[The information referred to follows:]



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

January 13, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

SENT VIA FAX: 202-647-2283

Dear Secretary Rice:

On behalf of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, I am writing to request that you urge President Mubarak to prevent the imminent deportation of hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers back to Sudan, where many of them reportedly faced religious persecution.

As you are aware, approximately 3,000 Sudanese had been staging a peaceful protest in Cairo since September. On December 30, Egyptian police attempted to disperse the assembly by firing water cannons at the protesters and beating many of them. In the ensuing violence, at least 25 men, women and children died.

The deaths at the hands of the Egyptian police warrant an independent inquiry. Rather than initiating an investigation, however, the Egyptian government chose to arrest 2,500 of the protesters, holding more than 650 in prisons to be deported to Sudan on the grounds that they are either "illegal immigrants or refugees who violated security conditions." The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was initially given three days to interview all 650 of them to determine which were in need of protection from deportation. The UNHCR flew staff in from its headquarters to supplement the number of interviewers, but asked the Egyptian authorities for an additional month. The Egyptian government gave UNHCR little more than a week, requiring that the agency finish talking to the detainees by Sunday, January 15.

UNHCR has repeatedly asked the Egyptian authorities that "no one (among the Sudanese) be deported." Today, UNHCR further stated that: "Egypt acceded in 1981 to the 1951 Refugee Convention and as a result has basic responsibilities towards refugees and asylum seekers, including registration and status determination. Deportation of persons of concern to UNHCR is considered a violation of the Convention."

Michael Cromartie, Chair • Felice D. Gaer, Vice Chair • Nina Shea, Vice Chair
Khaled Abou El Fadl • Preeti D. Bansal • Archbishop Charles J. Chaput • Richard D. Land • Elizabeth H. Prodromou
Bishop Ricardo Ramirez • Ambassador John V. Hanford III, *Ex-Officio* • Joseph R. Crapa, *Executive Director*

800 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, NW SUITE 790 | WASHINGTON, DC 20002 | 202-523-3240 | 202-523-5020 (FAX)

The December 30 incident should be investigated, and the appropriate officials should be held accountable if excessive force was employed in dispersing the protesters. Instead, Egypt has ordered many potential witnesses – who claim to be either refugees or asylum seekers -- deported without access to a meaningful refugee status determination.

After more than two decades of civil war, Sudan is in the process of implementing its peace agreement. The Commission is currently on mission to Sudan to investigate progress in the area of human rights – and particularly religious freedom – in the context of that agreement. At this time, however, conditions in Sudan are such that the international community has not yet considered ending international protection for any Sudanese refugees. Moreover, according to UNHCR, some of the asylum seekers facing deportation are from the Darfur region, which continues to be beset by genocide.

We urge the United States Government to publicly – and without further delay – call upon the Egyptian government to initiate an inquiry into the tragic incident of December 30, and to prevent the involuntary removal of any Sudanese asylum seeker or refugee who may have been involved in this tragic incident.

Sincerely,



Michael Cromartie
Chair

CC:

The Honorable R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
The Honorable Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs
The Honorable Ellen Sauerbrey, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration
The Honorable Jendayi E. Frazer, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs
The Honorable C. David Welch, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs
The Honorable Michael Kozak, Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights and International Organizations, National Security Council
The Honorable John V. Hanford III, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you. It just appears to me that, you know, we should be able to at least have some constructive conversations with governments that we are very aligned with. You know, we continually support Egypt tremendously and of course they are allies to us also; however, I even think that Egypt could do a lot more as relates to their influence on Sudan. I think that President of Egypt, Mubarak could have influence over Bashir. They were actually even combined as one country for a short period of time in the history and so our so-called friends ought to in some instances apply some pressure to try to assist us in some of these difficult situations.

Ms. SHEA. Well, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. Government really establish a timetable to insist on reforms. And if deadlines are not met the U.S. should reconsider the appropriate allocation of assistance to the Egyptian Government. And we are very concerned that—one of our concerns is that the NGOs or civic society groups, human rights groups, that they be able to receive funding that is not vetted by the Egyptian Government, receive U.S. funding. If the Egyptian Government can receive U.S. funding, why can't NGOs receive U.S. funding?

Mr. PAYNE. I couldn't agree with you more. Just one last question with regard to another ally in Morocco. It seems once again it is not particularly religious; however, the Polisario, the Western Saharans who finally received their independence from Spain in 1975 when it was Spanish Sahara, then Morocco said well, we are going to recolonize it because before Spain took it 6, 700 years ago it was a part of Morocco. It is just unfortunate that, once again, Morocco is a very strong ally with the U.S. Even in the first Persian Gulf incursion Morocco was the first Arab country to join the coalition. They have always been friendly with the U.S. going into the Congo back in the 1960s back when Mobutu was propped up by Morocco. They actually went in and propped up that government because they were anti-communist, and to get out Mobutu and the billions that he stole, and I guess he was our dictator so he was all right. But it seems to me there should be a little more attention paid to Morocco. I know they have had the problem with the NIF government, the National Islamic Front, that finds themselves not only in Morocco but Algeria, but Morocco being—as a matter of fact Morocco was one of the first countries to somehow recognize the United States back in the 1700s. I didn't know that they existed. I may have to check that fact out again.

If we could somehow impose upon the King there that there ought to be some real discussion about their occupation of Western Sahara because it is really wrong for a country to be able to get independence from one colonial power, and for another one to say we were there before you were there, and so you are ours.

Thank you.

Ms. SHEA. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. McCollum.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I appreciate your testimony, and you are available to be reached by our office. And if I have follow-up I will ask then. I look forward to hearing from the other witnesses.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

I would like to invite the final panel to the witness table. Beginning first with Father Firas Nasib Aridah, who is a Jordanian priest serving the Roman Catholic Parish of Our Lady Mother of Sorrows Church in the village of Aboud in the West Bank since 2003. Father Firas has been a leader in helping to strengthen the interfaith alliances among Christians and Muslim residents of Aboud. Father Firas oversees all of the community and educational activities at the parish of Our Lady Mother of Sorrows. Father Firas was ordained in Amman, Jordan, in 2002 and was subsequently named parish priest in Zarka, Jordan.

We will then hear from Ms. Rosie Malek-Yonan, who is the author of *The Crimson Field*, a historical and literary epic novel set in Urmia, Iran. It is based on real events and the true family chronicles set to the backdrop of the Assyrian genocide of 1914–1918 in the shadows of WWI where 750,000 Assyrians were massacred by the Ottoman Turks, aided by the Kurds. Currently she travels the country lecturing about how the forgotten page of history depicted in her book is tragically repeating itself with the persecution of the Assyrian Christians in present day Iraq.

We will then hear from Kit Bigelow, Director of External Affairs for the National Spiritual Assembly. Ms. Bigelow has overall responsibility for the functioning of the Washington based Office of External Affairs and the Office of the U.S. Baha'i. She is Representative to the UN in New York as well.

Ms. Bigelow is also the co-chair of the steering committee of the Women in International Law Interest Group, and author of the article "A Campaign to Deter Genocide: The Baha'i Experience."

Father Firas, if you can begin.

**STATEMENT OF FATHER FIRAS ARIDAH, OUR LADY MOTHER
OF SORROWS CHURCH, ABOUD, WEST BANK**

Father FIRAS. Before I begin, I apologize for my English.

I am Father Firas Aridah, and I was born in Jordan. I serve the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem as a Roman Catholic priest for the parish of Our Lady of Sorrows Church in the village of Aboud located in the West Bank.

Mr. Chairman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the plight of religious minorities. I also want to thank you for your tireless efforts to secure human rights around the world. It is clear that if one person's rights are denied, the rights of all are in danger. If one person's rights are denied, we cannot be sure that we will enjoy democratic freedom or any God given rights.

I would also like to take a moment to offer a special thank you to two men of incredible character, conscience and reason, qualities so crucial in today's world. His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, who visited me in Aboud, and Chairman Henry Hyde have devoted themselves to protecting the well-being of all people, standing up to injustice and defending freedom. As they leave their respective positions, I am confident they will continue to face new challenges and represent those without representation.

I am here to tell the story of Aboud and why it serves as an example of problems all Christian communities in the Holy Land face. Sometimes it seems we are caught between two extremes. In-

security and loss of economic livelihood, as well as the disruptive actions resulting from severe restrictions on mobility and land confiscation in the West Bank affects the pastoral mission of all our churches and the ability of ordinary Christians to live out their religious faith.

Last October, the Israeli military issued land confiscation orders to take land owned by Aboud residents to build the security barrier. The orders were given without any input or consultation of the landowners, a procedure expected from democratic government.

I am deeply concerned as well for the rise of religious extremism: Christian, Jewish, and Islamic. Righteousness cannot obscure the agony and pain experienced by Palestinian and Israeli children. Along with other religious leaders in the Holy Land, I work daily to curb this growing trend.

As you can see from the first attachment, Aboud is a small village northwest of Jerusalem and 6 kilometers from the 67th line, Israel's internationally recognized border.

The Christian history of Aboud dates back to when Jesus and the Holy Family passed through Aboud en route from Galilee to Jerusalem. There are remains of nine ancient Christian churches dating back to the early centuries and visited yearly by pilgrims from all over the world. Local tradition holds that residents of Aboud received the Christian faith from Jesus himself. Christ is said to have preached in Aboud where the ruins of the Messiah Church stand.

Aboud is a village of approximately 2,200 people. Around 1,000 are Christians, the rest are Muslims. The village is a model of interfaith respect as Christians and Muslims have lived together peacefully for centuries. The Catholic school, founded in 1913, educates Christians and Muslims. Since last December, Jewish Israelis and Christian and Muslim Palestinians hold a prayer vigil every Friday for Aboud.

Two Israelis settlements have been constructed on land owned by Aboud residents. The first, Beit Arye, was founded in 1980 as a military area and base. With a year, the Israeli Government converted this military base into a settlement for Israeli civilians. It occupies almost 400 acres of Aboud's land. The second settlement, Ofarim, was established in 1982 and occupies 100 acres of land. Like Beit Arye, it was initially declared a military area, and then was turned into a civilian population. The land was confiscated without adequate compensation to landowners.

Last year, the Israeli military issued additional orders for the confiscation of Aboud's land without compensation to build the security barrier. I deeply understand Israel's need for security and it has an obligation to protect its citizens. I am uncertain, however, whether this will improve Israel's security and if the current routing in Aboud is for security purposes.

Aboud residents will suffer from the barrier in two significant ways: The loss of water and olive trees. First, the Israeli Government will control the water supply. Since 1967, Israel has severely restricted Aboud residents' use of the western aquifer in the West Bank, the richest aquifer in terms of quality and quantity. The Israeli Government also prevents Aboud residents from drilling wells to access fresh water beneath their village. Therefore, Aboud

residents must purchase their water from Mekorot, Israel's national water company.

The Israeli Government alleges that the barrier will have no impact on water pipes and networks that currently serve the Aboud community. The Israeli Government argues that because the connection pipes could be rerouted, Aboud will have water access. It is important to distinguish between access and control of water resources. Water access for Aboud can only happen when they are allowed to control their water resources and drill new wells inside the western aquifer.

Without control of the water, commercial farming, the main source of income, will be impossible. There is also serious health problems associated with Aboud's lack of access to safe water. In 2005, Aboud was supplied with 52,260 cubic meters. This means that approximately 50 liters per capita per day was available to Aboud residents, which is less than half the amount suggested by the World Health Organization, 100 liters per capita per day.

Second, the barrier destroys acres of olive groves in Aboud and uproots over 10,000 olive trees. So far the Israeli Government has uprooted 4,000 olive tree without adequate compensation.

Many of these trees are over 1,000 years old and have been in their respective families for centuries. For our families, the olive tree is a symbol of life and income. Generations of families have provided for their families from these olive groves. One olive tree produces up to \$200 of profit per season. The Israeli Government offered to buy or compensate each destroyed tree for \$15 or \$25. That is an insult and is not an equitable solution.

For that reason I am deeply troubled by the effect of the barrier and the influence religious extremists will have on Christian institutions and the presence of their communities in the Holy Land.

As a priest, I am inspired by St. Thomas Aquinas, who believed that missionary work is crucial to bringing peace. Christian churches run schools, hospitals, senior citizen homes, and orphanages. These institutions serve as a safety net for many families and provide a valuable link between communities.

We can live together. However, this is only possible when each human being is accepting of the other without conditions. Then they can live in peace. If conditions are imposed and only one way is mandated, this is not the way of God. Each human must be treated fairly. The Israeli occupation must end. Violence and terrorism must stop. There must be no more settlements on Palestinian land. My prayer is that God will touch each heart to bring peace and justice and love to our Holy Land.

On behalf of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the loving stones in the Holy Land, I extend an invitation to you to come and visit my village and the Holy Land.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee. And God bless you all, and I am pleased to try to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Father Firas follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FATHER FIRAS ARIDAH, OUR LADY MOTHER OF SORROWS
CHURCH, ABOUD, WEST BANK

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony before your committee on the issue of "The Plight of Religious Minorities: Can Religious Pluralism Survive?" This issue affects me, my parishioners and all Christians in the Holy Land. It is our hope that increased awareness of the facts regarding our situation will help affect U.S. policy regarding Israel and Palestine.

I am a Jordanian priest serving the Roman Catholic Parish of Our Lady Mother of Sorrows Church in the village of Aboud in the West Bank since 2003. I oversee all the community and educational activities at the parish, and have worked to strengthen inter-faith alliances among the Christian and Muslim residents of Aboud. We have good relations with the Jewish settlements nearest to us: Beit Ayre and Ofarim. I will summarize my remarks and ask that my full written testimony be entered into the record.

I will limit my testimony to the challenges that the Palestinian Christians of Aboud face to survive and remain in the Holy Land. Many of these present challenges have been created by Israel's construction of the security barrier. The barrier will confiscate around 1,500 acres of Aboud's land. As a result, Aboud will be physically separated from surrounding villages and its land. The land is the source of Aboud's livelihood. Aboud's agriculturally based economy will be seriously eroded and important grazing land will be lost. The barrier will also impede access to health care and education facilities. Furthermore, the barrier will restrict the land available for the natural growth of Aboud residents, resulting in serious housing shortages. Most harmful, will be the inability to control our own water.

In addition, the onerous system of checkpoints, permits, and closures makes daily life extremely difficult and restricts access to major worship sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. I come today to tell the story of my villagers and ask your help in getting the security barrier by Aboud moved to a different location. A security barrier already exists on the international recognized 1967 border. The additional security barrier will add more hardship to Aboud.

I also intend to explain how Aboud is a positive model for pluralism in the West Bank—a fragile model that will only survive if certain corrections are made.

We have been fortunate to have the support of many Christians in the United States. I would like to thank His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Honorable Henry J. Hyde for all their work to save and protect the Christian narrative in the Holy Land. Recently, Cardinal McCarrick and representatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops visited Aboud and brought it to the attention of the highest levels in the Bush Administration, the United States Congress and the press. The people of Aboud and I are grateful to all the churches and people across America who have supported our cause.

ABOUT ABOUD

Aboud is a small village nestled in olive groves northwest of Jerusalem and 4 miles east of the 1967 Green Line, the internationally recognized border between Israel and Palestine (UN Security Council Resolution 242). It is situated on a ridge and looks out over a valley toward Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. The population is approximately 2,200 residents of which almost half are Christian. Two settlements with a total population of around 6,500 are located northwest of Aboud. They are Beit Ayre and Ofarim, established in 1980 and 1982 respectively.

The Christian history of Aboud dates back to when Jesus and the Holy Family passed through Aboud enroute to Jerusalem from the Galilee. There are remains of seven ancient Christian churches dating back to the early centuries and visited yearly by pilgrims from all over the world. Local tradition holds that residents of Aboud received the Christian faith from Jesus himself. Christ is said to have preached in Aboud where the ruins of the Messiah church stand. Another example of Aboud's ancient Christian heritage is St. Barbara Greek Orthodox Church, named in honor of our village patron, Saint Barbara, was built by the Emperor Constantine and his mother, Helen. (This church was destroyed in 2001 for security reasons by an Israeli bomb.) Today, there are two churches in Aboud, including one Greek Orthodox and my Roman Catholic parish of Our Lady Mother of Sorrows.

A PEACEFUL VILLAGE

Aboud is a small, peaceful village with good relations among Christians and Muslims and also with the Israelis living in the nearby settlements. I have worked with the Christian and Muslim residents of Aboud to strengthen inter-faith relations. During the feasts of Christmas and Easter, the Muslims in Aboud come to the multi-purpose room of our church to celebrate with us. Muslims also come to the ancient site of St. Barbara to celebrate her feast day. Likewise, Christians go to the hall in front of the Muslim community's mosque to celebrate both the end of the month-long Ramadan fast and Adha which takes place 70 days after Ramadan. People of the two faiths often travel together and are protective of each other at checkpoints. There is no extreme violence in our village, and if a conflict arises within the Christian community, or with anyone, the parish priest helps them work out the problem. No suicide bomber ever came from Aboud.

When Aboud's land was taken for the settlements of Beit Ayre and Ofarim, the decision was made to accept the situation. Lately, however, the situation is deteriorating because of the extreme security measures Israel has taken. While we remain friends with many Israelis, our primary problems come from the friction with Israeli government and military officials over the occupying authority's security measures. Unfortunately, settlers in other settlements farther away did burn and uproot 4,000 olive trees in December 2000, and previously uprooted 500 grape vines in October of 2005.

THE EFFECT OF THE SECURITY WALL ON ABOUD

All governments must provide security for their citizens, so I understand the need for Israel to provide security for their citizens. However, the security measures it has developed as an occupying authority in the West Bank have created difficulties and resentment among all Palestinians. The barrier is the latest extreme measure in a long list of measures implemented in the name of security. Please refer to the map in your packet. The barrier already exists as a high wire fence with a dirt road and security cameras along the 1967 border. The heavy blue and red lines on the map delineate where the barrier will be built near Aboud. Our land for this barrier has already been taken and plowed under by the military. The Israeli military states that the blue line indicates state land and the red line indicates land owned by Aboud. Aboud disagrees with Israel's definition and characterization of the blue line. Aboud appealed the placement of the barrier to the Israeli Supreme Court, but on May 16, 2006, the Supreme Court said the barrier should go ahead as shown on the map. I come before you today, on behalf of the people of Aboud, and ask the help of the United States Congress and the Bush Administration to help us reroute the barrier before it is erected and worsens the situation on the ground as explained in the rest of my testimony.

Impact on the Economy

The preparation for the security barrier has already taken 36% of the Christian agricultural land (over 1000 acres) to protect and enlarge settlements. Even before the barrier has been erected, the loss of the land and olive trees has already badly damaged the people's livelihood. An ugly dusty swath winds its way through our olives groves and grazing fields. Seventy percent of our economy is agriculturally based and roughly one third of the land has been taken by the Israeli military for the barrier. Aboud is primarily a rural village whose economy is dependent on olive trees and grazing land for sheep and goats. The sheep and goats provide cheese, milk, wool, and meat. The shepherds cannot move their flocks where they need to go. This wall will block out large areas of grasslands in the face of farmers and shepherds. The olive trees are also an important part of Aboud's Christian heritage, some dating back a 1,000 years. Our farmers support their families by producing olives and olive oil. Residents have been compensated from between \$15-25 per tree. This is not adequate considering that one olive tree yields around \$200 of income per season. The economic impact on our village is tragic. Without access and control of our land we have no livelihood. Our villagers become more impoverished and this can only be a source of increased resentment. With sixty percent unemployment throughout the West Bank, there are very few opportunities for alternative jobs. The Israeli government has mentioned that gates will be put in the barrier for us to access our fields. However, these will be locked and controlled by the Israelis. They have the ability to close them whenever they wish, putting our crops and livestock at risk if they cannot be tended. Examples from other similar access gates in the West Bank indicate that access is sporadic and cannot be depended upon. I fear some of my parishioners will leave the Holy Land entirely if they cannot support their families.

Impact on the Water Supply

The residents of Aboud are very concerned about their long-term access to water. Since 1967 they have not been allowed to drill their own wells and the Israelis completely control the water supply. As you can see from the map, the water aquifer runs from north to south on the west (Israeli) side of the security barrier. This aquifer supplies water for Aboud, and of five nearby Israeli settlements. The Israelis have complete access and control of the western aquifer. They also have complete control of a small water reservoir on the east side of the wall between Aboud and the proposed barrier (see map). While this may appear to give control of the water to the residents of Aboud, it does not. The reservoir is surrounded with a high chain link fence topped with barbed wire. It is always locked and only Israeli officials and settlers have keys. It is not accessible to the people of the village. Once a month they come to maintain the pump. During the summer when water is scarce, Israel rations the water supply it controls for only a few hours a day for the residents of Aboud. However, the settlements get water 24 hours a day, seven days a week. During the rest of the year, the water pressure is erratic and undependable. This reservoir has to supply water to five communities. The long-term fear of Aboud residents is that Israel has the ability to shut down the water completely whenever it wants; and in the worst case, close down the Aboud reservoir and build another reservoir in the aquifer for the Israeli side only. With the barrier on the other side of the aquifer, the Aboud residents would not have access to any water. The residents of Aboud, like other Palestinians, receive less than half the amount of water the World Health Organization suggests for a minimum. In addition, there is a huge disparity in consumption by Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Palestinians. Israeli settlers in the West Bank consume 3–4 times as much water than Palestinians.

Impact on Population Expansion

New construction for homes and businesses is limited to the Aboud city limits (see map). Housing for increased population in the north would have to be vertical. Permits would not be issued for the northern part of town because Israeli officials have restricted the height of buildings near the barrier. Thus, the barrier will affect the spread of construction despite the natural increase of population. As a result, a larger number of Aboud villagers will leave Aboud and leave the city. As a church we are doing all that we can to protect the existing Christians. However, they and the Muslim residents of Aboud are affected psychologically by the impending barrier. They feel trapped and that the future is closing down. Since 2001, 34 Christian families have left Aboud, and relocated to other places in Palestine to find better economic opportunities.

The Real Reason for the Barrier

As you can see from the map, the reason for the barrier is for the protection and expansion of the settlements of Beit Ayre and Ofarim and to control the water aquifer that supplies those two settlements and three others in the area.

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem's Visit to Aboud regarding the Barrier

In December 2005, Michel Sabbah, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, planted an olive tree on the planned route of the barrier and told 1,000 peaceful protesters, "The wall doesn't benefit the security of either Israel or anybody else. Our prayers are for the removal of this physical wall currently under construction and the return of our lands. Our hearts are filled with love, and no hatred for anybody. With our faith and love, we demand the removal of this wall. We affirm that it is a mistake and an attack against our lands and our properties, and an attack against friendly relationships between the two people."

CHECKPOINTS AND PERMIT SYSTEM CREATES ADDITIONAL HARDSHIPS

The checkpoint, permit, closure, and Israeli-bypass road systems were created in the name of Israeli security. Unfortunately, these have created great hardships for traveling in the West Bank and especially into Jerusalem, the heart of the Christian narrative. Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967. The United States considers East Jerusalem to be Occupied Territory. The checkpoints on passable roads cause long lines, creating delays and sometimes denial of passage. Long waits up to several hours are not uncommon. Many roads are not accessible for my parishioners to exit from Aboud. If they take a back road to bypass a checkpoint, they risk being caught or even being shot by a settler. The villages have become like large prisons.

Lack of Access to Good Medical Care

Preferred medical care is in the larger towns of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. However, going to one of these hospitals is a major ordeal. Long lines at onerous checkpoints jeopardize a critically ill patient's life. Many times a permit is needed to get through a checkpoint or to go into East Jerusalem. There are many well known incidents of people dying from heart attacks and giving birth at the checkpoints.

Limited Educational Opportunities

Because East Jerusalem is annexed by Israel, the children of my parishioners cannot attend Christian schools there. They also do not have access to special-needs education.

Difficulty in Getting to Worship

One of the privileges of living in the Holy Land is worshipping at the most sacred places of the Christian narrative: The Church of Annunciation in Nazareth; The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem; the Palm Sunday and Good Friday (Via Dolorosa) processions and Holy Resurrections Service in Jerusalem. It is customary for people in the Holy Land to travel to the city where the actual event took place rather than attend their local parish. However access is limited to worship services in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth during Christmas, Easter and other holidays. Last Easter our church asked for permits to go to Palm Sunday and Holy Week. We asked for 300 permits for our parishioners and were granted only 100 (30% of what we asked). The situation was repeated at Christmas to go to Bethlehem via Jerusalem. This is a serious violation of religious freedom as I understand it.

Inability to Fulfill Mission Work

Our church has built an extensive network of development oriented institutions that help others, such as hospitals, clinics and schools. There is difficulty in staffing these institutions and getting supplies to them. The Christian mission in the Holy Land is being frustrated more and more.

Inability to see Family Members

Permits and checkpoints make family visits almost impossible. Families are often unable to get together without great hardship, hurting crucial family life.

Large Fines for Permit Violations

One-day-only permits are issued to Palestinians going into Israel, including occupied East Jerusalem. In other words, the traveler must complete travel in a twelve-hour cycle. Lack of a permit or an improper permit may result in going to prison from one to three months and paying a \$1,000 fine. Drivers' licenses can be suspended for three months. Even carrying a passenger without a permit will result in the three-month license suspension for the driver. The permit system is arbitrary and not useable at every checkpoint. Every soldier can do whatever he wants.

WHAT MY PARISHIONERS AND ALL THE CHRISTIANS NEED

1. Access to all their land
2. Access to Christian schools
3. Access to Christian hospitals
4. Access to Christian holy sites
5. Specifically for Aboud: Change the route of the security barrier so that our land and water can be under the control of its residents and the people it serves.

CONCLUSION: OUR PLIGHT AS A RELIGIOUS MINORITY. CAN PLURALISM SURVIVE IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE?

I believe the answer is yes. The above testimony explains the plight my Christian parishioners are experiencing as a religious minority in the West Bank.

I have limited most of the remarks to my personal experience in Aboud, but believe that most of our problems are shared by other Christians in the Holy Land.

Despite the difficulties, I believe that pluralism can survive in Israel and Palestine. The village of Aboud is a positive model of peaceful co-existence. As previously mentioned in my testimony, Christians and Muslims help celebrate a number of religious feasts throughout the year. They share problems. We share rides. Whoever is going out of the village, others ride with them. Relations with the nearby settlements of Beit Ayre and Ofarim are not violent. We have good Jewish peo-

ple, good Muslims and good Christians. We can live together. However, this is only possible when each human being is accepting of the other without conditions. Then they can live in peace. If conditions are imposed and only one way is mandated, this is not the way of God. Each human must be treated fairly. The Israeli occupation must end. Violence and terrorism must stop. There must be no more settlements on Palestinian land. My prayer is that God will touch each heart to bring peace and justice and love to our Holy Land.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Mr. SMITH. Father Firas, thank you for your testimony and for traveling so far to be with us today. It is a privilege to have you here.

I would like to welcome Ms. Malek-Yonan.

STATEMENT OF MS. ROSIE MALEK-YONAN, AUTHOR, "THE CRIMSON FIELD"

Ms. MALEK-YONAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

Mr. Chairman, I have a list attached to my statement, and in the interest of time I am not going to read through it.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, your full statement will be made a part of the record.

Ms. MALEK-YONAN. My name is Rosie Malek-Yonan. I am not a politician. I am not a member of any political group or organization. I am an author. I am a Christian. I am an Assyrian. I am an American citizen.

I am here to tell you about a 15-year-old boy named Fadi Shamoon. Fadi was happily riding a new bike his father had given him when suddenly on October 5, 2004, he was yanked off his new bike and kidnapped by terrorist Islamic Kurds. His family went crazy wondering what happened to Fadi, until a neighbor found his body thrown out on the roadside like garbage. He was in pieces. His body was barbarically mutilated and burned, and he was beheaded in a horrific manner.

As unthinkable and unimaginable his crime was, it wasn't the first time that the residents of the Assyrian district of Ba'asheeqa had seen. Just prior to this, the Assyrians had mourned another son, 14-year-old Julian Afram Yacoub when he was hit on the head with a concrete block and burned.

Killing innocent Christian children has become fashionable in Iraq, forcing many Christians to flee their homes and villages, moneyless and helpless.

In my recently published historical epic novel, *The Crimson Field*, I have relayed the factual atrocities that were unleashed on my people in the span of 4 years, from 1914 to 1918, which wiped out two-thirds of my Assyrian population totaling 750,000.

I have lost great-grandparents, great uncles, great aunts and many others. My people were victimized at the hands of the Islamic Kurds and Turks 91 years ago for being Christian. My people are still being victimized at the hands of the Islamic Kurds today for being Christian. My churches are bombed. My elders are being killed. My young brothers are being assaulted and kidnapped. My fellow students are being harassed and beaten. My children and neighbors are being beheaded.

If my sister refuses to wear the Muslim hijab, she is raped and tortured by having acid thrown in her face. And yes, the majority

of these incidents have gone unreported in the Western media. These atrocities are occurring right under the watchful eyes of my American Government since the “liberation” of Iraq.

March 16, 1918: “150 souls perished that black day. 150 souls that were accounted for. 150 souls that were loved by fathers, and mothers. By sons and daughters. By sisters and brothers, by wives and lovers. 150 souls, each one of them with individual names who were expected at dinner tables that evening. That night and every night, 150 chairs would remain unoccupied, each leaving an empty space in the hearts of a nation on the brink of total extinction. 150 candles flickered in the distance when angels swept the Earth for their souls.”

That was an excerpt from my book, *The Crimson Field*. I could have been writing about the plight of today’s Assyrians in Iraq. History is repeating itself, and no one is taking notice. No one except my people.

We Assyrians are a nation without boundaries. For thousands of years we have survived by sheer will power. Nearly a century ago in the shadows of World War I my grandparents struggled to survive to save future generations of Assyrians from extinction. Now that burden is mine to carry. Now my generation faces that same struggle to save my nation from total extinction in Iraq.

We care about the preservation of the bald eagle and strive to save it from extinction. We pass laws forbidding the hunting of a bald eagle. Yet we allow the oldest nation in the world to become extinct. This is unforgivable. Assyrians like myself living in diaspora in our adopted countries are doing what we can to bring awareness to the plight of our people. We are not soldiers. We can’t fight in the streets of Baghdad. But we write books and articles. We hold lectures and make documentary films. We hold vigils and debates. We march and go on hunger strikes and peaceful demonstrations. We hold rallies and we speak.

When you gain knowledge of atrocities occurring, you are in essence bearing witness to those facts and as such you inherit the absolute responsibility to testify to and to alleviate those human miseries.

We Assyrians are not extraordinary people. But we are caught up in the crossfires of extraordinary events. And yet, we don’t fight violence with violence. We don’t retaliate because we just want to live. When our churches are bombed, we don’t think of retribution. We walk away, as Christians should.

Just this week 7,000 Assyrians left Baghdad for the northern part of Iraq. The women and children have taken refuge in other Assyrian homes while the men sleep in the cemeteries at night, and I don’t mean this figuratively. I mean literally. They sleep in cemeteries because they have no other shelter. These suffering Assyrians in Iraq depend on our courage in the Western world to help them.

A few months ago I met with Mar Gewargis Sliwa, the Assyrian Archbishop of Iraq from the Assyrian Catholic Church of the East. His account of the lives of Assyrian children in Iraq was appalling and heartbreaking. He said to me we can’t help our children anymore. They play in fields of blood. We are a poor nation. We need help. Please help us.

Just days ago I spoke with His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, the Patriarch of the Assyrian Catholic Church of the East who told me that priests in Iraq can no longer wear their clerical robes in public. They have to dress as civilians or they will be targeted and attacked by Islamists.

Today's Iraq was once part of Assyria. Assyria was the first nation to accept Christianity. The Assyrian Church was founded in 33 A.D. Today my Assyrian nation's future is in serious trouble. Iraq's Assyrian population of 1.4 million before the Iraq War has now dwindled down to nearly 800,000 with no one protecting their interests.

Although Assyrians are the indigenous people of Iraq, they are now either being victimized and killed or being driven out of their homeland. Their practice of the Christian religion is not being tolerated or allowed by the terrorist and Islamic Kurds. Acts of violence and aggression toward the Assyrian Christians of Iraq are frequent occurrences. For example, Assyrian churches are prime targets of anti-Assyrian and anti-Christian campaigns killing and injuring many, many Assyrians.

From June 2004 to 2006, 27 Assyrian churches were attacked or bombed for the sole reason that they were the house of worship of Assyrian Christians. On one occasion six churches were simultaneously bombed in Baghdad and Kirkuk. On another occasion another six churches were simultaneously bombed in Baghdad and Mosul. Simultaneous church bombings are a recurring problem and pattern.

Despite the push for Iraq to become a democratic country, the unthinkable brutality of Saddam Hussein has now shifted and is being unleashed onto the Assyrians by Islamic fundamentalists and the Kurdish power that is rapidly rising in Iraq since the new so-called "democratic" Iraq emerged. I say so-called democratic because it is not democracy when election fraud and intimidation runs rampant.

For the first time in Iraq's history, Assyrians were able to take part in the January 2005 elections. But thousands of Assyrians of the Nineveh Plain did not even get a chance to vote. In the Assyrians towns and villages, ballot boxes did not arrive. And Kurdish officials in charge of the voting process never showed up. There are numerous accounts of ballot box thefts. Where Assyrians could have voted, the armed Kurdish militia and the secret police made their presence known near the polling stations, intimidating the already frightened women and elderly Assyrians. And in Assyrian provinces, Kurdish votes were generated in abundance in place of Assyrians votes.

Today in war-torn Iraq, being denied their most basic human rights, these ancient and indigenous people continue to be the target of systematic oppression, murder, intimidation, kidnapping and violence. Assyrians in Northern Iraq are marginalized by the Kurds who have gained momentum and are exercising the same brand of violence they once complained of during Saddam Hussein's dictatorship.

Since the start of the Iraq war, various Eastern media outlets have steadily reported some, but not all of the violent crimes per-

petrated against Assyrians. I have a mere sampling of these crimes attached to my statement which you have before you.

However, most of these crimes go undocumented and unreported in the Western media. The fact that such cases are falling through the cracks does not in any way diminish their validity and legitimacy. Reported or not, when basic human rights are violated, crimes against humanity have been committed.

Other examples of Assyrians being marginalized can be found in the newly drafted Iraqi Constitution's preamble. The Arabs, Kurds and Turkomans are specifically mentioned, whereas Assyrians are omitted. Additionally, the preamble cites atrocities against the Kurds but completely ignores those against the Assyrians during Saddam's regime as well as the 1933 Assyrian Massacre in Semele, Iraq.

Iraq's "liberation" has become the "oppression" of Assyrians. The war in Iraq is silently taking its toll on the Assyrians, particularly in the northern regions of Kirkuk, Mosul and Baghdad, where the Assyrian population is concentrated. In the Nineveh Plains and its surrounding regions, under the Kurdish regional government, and through a dictatorship, Assyrian lands are being illegally confiscated, and yet Assyrians don't strike back. We remain peaceful and tolerant under intolerable conditions.

There is no aid or funding going to Assyrian regions under our American watch. Basic medical need is nonexistent for these Christians. A woman cannot have a C-section in her own neighborhood. She has to drive miles away and risk her life and the life of her unborn child to receive medical care. We Assyrians are not asking for anything beyond the aid that is already going to Iraq for redevelopment. But we are asking that Assyrians proportionally receive aid sent to Assyrian regions.

In Northern Iraq millions of dollars in funding by the United States are assigned to be overlooked by Kurdish political parties who are primarily using these moneys for their own advantage instead of a fair and equitable distribution to much-needed funds to be sent to Assyrian leadership to be used for Assyrian communities that are in dire need.

Today Assyrians are one of the most vulnerable minorities in the world. Under our watch, the largest Assyrian exodus is under way. It is estimated that if things continue to proceed as they are right now, within 10 years the Assyrian population of Iraq will be eradicated because of the ethnic cleansing, forced exodus and migration.

The indigenous people of the United States, the American Indians, have their human rights secured in the homeland in America. The indigenous people of Iraq, the Assyrian Christians, are being driven out of their homeland.

The displacement of Assyrians has become a seriously overlooked issue. During the Gulf War, thousands fled to Jordan. In 2003, during the early stages of the Iraq war, gripped by fear, 40,000 to 50,000 Assyrians fled to Syria. Since then, thousands have been leaving Iraq because of the threats they have received. Homeless and living on the streets of Syria and Jordan, Assyrians helplessly await assistance.

According to statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in October 2005 about 700,000 Iraqis fled to

Syria. Between October 2003 and March 2005, 36 percent of these refugees were Christian Iraqis. That is 252,000 Assyrian Christian refugees.

When the Iraq War started, Assyrians didn't have a "safe region" to go to within Iraq so naturally they ran to neighboring countries like Syria and Jordan. But since Assyrians are not displaced internally in Iraq, they no longer qualify for the current "displacement" assistance program. These Assyrian refugees who once led productive lives in Iraq have resorted to begging, slavery, prostitution, and selling organs just to survive and feed their families.

This is happening under the watch, our watch, under the watch in America. The flip side of this is that millions of displaced Kurds are returning with assistance to settle back into their own regions because they, unlike the Assyrians, have a "safe region" to go to within Iraq. We must balance this.

It is an undisputable fact that Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilization and Assyrian Christians are the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, present day Iraq. It is also undisputable that Assyrians are a part of the fabric of today's Iraq, enduring under the constraint of Shari'a or Islamic law through an in-name-only democratic Iraq.

Article (2)b of the Iraqi Constitution states: "No law can be passed that contradicts the principles of democracy." Article (2)a of the Iraqi Constitution states: "No law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam."

These two articles are in contradiction with one another.

One of the rules of Islam which can be found in the Koran at chapter 3, line 19 states: "The only true faith in God's sight is Islam." In chapter 3, line 86 the Koran states: "He that chooses a religion over Islam, it will not be accepted from him and in the world to come he will be one of the lost."

Christians having chosen a religion over Islam are considered infidels and idolaters. In chapter 2, lines 190 to 193, the Koran dictates to all Muslims to "slay them wherever you find them, drive them out of the place from which they drove you. Idolatry is worse than carnage." and so, Christian churches are bombed and Christians are slain; Assyrian Christians.

Despite being the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, Assyrians are discriminated against and treated as unwanted guests in their own homeland as they face the threat of yet another modern day ethnic cleansing by the Islamic Kurds that is reminiscent of the ethnic cleansing of nearly a century ago exercised by the then Ottoman Turks and Kurds.

Today's Middle East must become ethically balanced. Just like there is a Jewish state and an Arab state, there needs to be a Christian state. Although chapter 4 of article 121 of the Iraqi Constitution, entitled "Local Administration," guarantees the administrative, political, cultural, educational rights for various ethnicities such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and the other components, this law exists in theory only and not in practice.

With the Iraqi Government's oppression of the rights of Christians, Assyrians are looking to the international community and the Western world, in particular to the U.S. and UN, to intervene on their behalf, enabling them to establish their own Assyrian Ad-

ministrative Region in the Nineveh Plain in order to become once again a thriving and healthy community in Iraq.

This Assyrian Administrative Region will witness the return of Assyrian refugees to their ancestral homelands. However, this measure must be taken now. This is not an issue that can be placed on the back burner. The endangered Assyrian civilization that managed to survive under Genghis Khan, WWI and WWII is now spiraling out of control toward complete obliteration due to the present ethnic cleansing, assimilation and forced migration and refugee exodus.

On 9/11, America experienced a reasonably small example of Islamic terrorism as compared to that with which Christians in the Middle East are familiar. The world watched in horror as we, the citizens of this great nation, mourn our losses, and the world mourned with us. How shameful it would have been if the tragedy of 9/11 had gone unnoticed. How shameful it is that the tragedy of the Assyrian Genocide of last century went unnoticed. How shameful it is that the current Assyrian massacres are going unnoticed.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Malek-Yonan follows:]

Rosie Malek-Yonan
Author of *The Crimson Field*
Hearing Date: Friday, June 30, 2006
Committee: House Committee on International Relations

My name is Rosie Malek-Yonan. I am not a politician. I am not a member of any political group or organization. I am an author. I am a Christian. I am an Assyrian. I am an American citizen. I am here to tell you about a 15 year old boy named Fadi Shamoon.

Fadi was happily riding the new bike his father had given him, when suddenly on that 5th day of October, 2004, he was yanked off his new bike and kidnapped by terrorist Islamist Kurds. His family went crazy wondering what had happened to little Fadi, until a neighbor found Fadi's body thrown out on the roadside like garbage. He was in pieces. His body was barbarically mutilated and burned, and he was beheaded in a most horrific manner.

As unthinkable and unimaginable as this crime was, it wasn't the first that the residents of the Assyrian district of Ba'asheeqa had seen. Just prior to this, the Assyrians had mourned another son, 14 year old Julian Afram Yacoub when he was hit in the head with a concrete block and then burned. Killing innocent Christian children has become fashionable in Iraq, forcing many Christians to flee their homes and villages, money-less and helpless.

In my recently published historical epic novel, *The Crimson Field*, I have relayed the factual atrocities that were unleashed on my people in the span of four years from 1914 to 1918, which wiped out two-thirds of my Assyrian population totaling some 750,000.

I have lost great grand parents, great uncles, great aunts, and many others. My people were victimized at the hands of the Islamist Kurds and Turks 91 years ago for being Christian. My people are still being victimized at the hands of the Islamist Kurds today for being Christian.

My churches are being bombed. My elders are being killed. My young brothers are being assaulted and kidnapped. My fellow students are being harassed and beaten. My children and neighbors are being beheaded. If my sister refuses to wear a Muslim *hijab*, she is raped or tortured by having acid thrown in her face. And yes, the majority of these incidents have gone unreported in the western media. These atrocities are occurring right under the watchful eyes of my American government since the "liberation" of Iraq.

March 16, 1918: "One hundred fifty souls perished that black day [at the hands of the Kurds]. One hundred fifty souls that were accounted for. One hundred fifty souls that were loved by fathers and mothers. By sons and daughters. By sisters and brothers. By wives and lovers. One hundred fifty souls, each one of them with individual names, who were expected at dinner tables that evening. That night and every night, one hundred fifty chairs would remain unoccupied, each leaving an empty space in the hearts of a nation on the brink of total extinction. One hundred fifty candles flickered in the distance when angels swept the earth for their souls."

That was an excerpt from my book, *The Crimson Field*. I could have very well been writing about the plight of today's Assyrians in Iraq. History is repeating itself and no one is taking notice; No one except my people.

We Assyrians are a nation without boundaries. For thousands of years we have survived by sheer will power. Nearly a century ago, in the shadows of WWI, my grandparents struggled to survive to save future generations of Assyrians from extinction. Now that burden is mine to carry. Now my generation faces that same struggle to save my nation from total extinction in Iraq. We care about the preservation of the bald Eagle and strive to save it from extinction. We pass laws forbidding the hunting of a bald Eagle. Yet we allow the oldest nation in the world to become extinct. This is unforgivable.

Assyrians, like myself, living in diaspora in our adopted countries, are doing what we can to bring awareness to the plight of our people. We're not soldiers. We can't take up arms and fight in the streets of Baghdad. But we write books and articles, hold lectures, and make documentary films. We hold vigils and debates. We march. We go on hunger strikes and peaceful demonstrations. We hold rallies. We speak.

When you gain knowledge of atrocities occurring, you are in essence bearing witness to those facts and as such, you inherit the absolute responsibility to testify to and alleviate those human miseries.

We Assyrians are not extraordinary people. But we are caught up in the cross fires of extraordinary events. And yet we don't fight violence with violence. We don't retaliate. Because we just want to live. When our churches are bombed, we don't think of retribution. We walk away as Christians should.

Just this week, 7,000 Assyrians left Baghdad for Northern Iraq. The women and children have taken refuge in other Assyrian homes, while the men sleep in the cemeteries at night. I don't mean figuratively. I mean literally. They sleep in the cemeteries because they have no other shelter. These suffering Assyrians in Iraq depend on our courage in the western world to help them.

A few months ago, I met with Mar Gewargis Sliwa, the Assyrian Archbishop of Iraq from the Assyrian Catholic Church of the East. His account of the lives of Assyrian children in Iraq was appalling and heartbreaking. He said to me, "We can't help our children anymore. They play in fields of blood. We are a poor nation. We need help. Help us."

Just days ago I spoke with His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, the Patriarch of the Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, who told me that the priests in Iraq can no longer wear their clerical robes in public. They have to dress as civilians otherwise they are targeted and attacked by Islamists.

Today's Iraq was once part of Assyria. Assyria was the first nation to accept Christianity. The Assyrian Church was founded in 33 A.D. Today, my Assyrian nation's future is in serious trouble. Iraq's Assyrian population of 1.4 million before the Iraq war has now dwindled down to

nearly 800,000 with no one protecting their interests.

Though Assyrians are the indigenous people of Iraq, they are now either being victimized and killed, or being driven out of their homeland. Their practice of the Christian religion is not being tolerated or allowed by the terrorists and Islamist Kurds. Acts of violence and aggression towards the Assyrian Christians of Iraq are frequent occurrences. For example, Assyrian churches are prime targets of anti-Assyrian/anti-Christian campaigns, killing and injuring many Assyrians. From 2004 to June 2006, 27 churches were attacked or bombed for the sole reason that they were houses of worship of Assyrian Christians. On one occasion, 6 churches were simultaneously bombed in Baghdad and Kirkuk, and on another occasion an additional 6 churches were simultaneously bombed in Baghdad and Mosul. Simultaneous church bombings is a recurring pattern.

Despite the push for Iraq to become a democratic country, the unthinkable brutality of Saddam Hussein has now shifted and is being unleashed onto the Assyrians by Islamic fundamentalists and the Kurdish power that is rapidly rising in Iraq since the new so-called "democratic" Iraq emerged. I say "so-called" because it is not democracy when election fraud and intimidation runs rampant.

For the first time in Iraq's history, Assyrians were able to take part in the January 2005 elections. But thousands of Assyrians of the Nineveh Plain did not get a chance to vote. In the Assyrian towns and villages, ballot boxes did not arrive and Kurdish officials in charge of the voting process never showed up. There are numerous accounts of ballot box thefts. Where Assyrians could vote, the armed Kurdish militia and secret police made their presence known near the polling stations, intimidating the already frightened women and elderly Assyrians. And in Assyrian provinces, Kurdish votes were generated in abundance in place of Assyrian votes.

Today in war-torn Iraq, being denied their most basic human rights, these ancient and indigenous people continue to be the target of systematic oppression, murder, intimidation, kidnapping, and violence. Assyrians in Northern Iraq are marginalized by Kurds who have gained momentum and are exercising the same brand of violence they once complained of during Saddam's dictatorship.

Since the start of the Iraq war, various Eastern media outlets have steadily reported some, but not all of the violent crimes perpetrated against Assyrians. I have a mere sampling of these crimes attached to my Statement, which you have before you. However, most of these crimes go undocumented and unreported in the Western media. The fact that such cases are falling through the cracks does not in any way diminish their validity and legitimacy. Reported or not, when basic human rights are violated, crimes against humanity have been committed.

Other examples of Assyrians being marginalized can be found in the newly drafted Iraqi Constitution's Preamble. The Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomans are specifically mentioned, whereas Assyrians are omitted. Additionally, the Preamble cites atrocities against the Kurds but completely ignores those against the Assyrians during Saddam's regime as well as the 1933 Assyrian Massacre in Semele, Iraq.

Iraq's "liberation" has become the "oppression" of Assyrians. The war in Iraq is silently taking its toll on the Assyrians particularly in the Northern regions of Kirkuk, Mosul and Baghdad where the Assyrian population is concentrated. In the Nineveh Plains and its surrounding regions, under the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and through a dictatorship, Assyrian lands are being illegally confiscated.

And yet the Assyrians don't strike back. We remain peaceful and tolerant under intolerable conditions.

There is no aid or funding going to the Assyrian regions under our American watch. Basic medical need is non-existent for these Christians. A woman cannot have a c-section in her neighborhood. She has to drive miles away and risk her life and the life of her unborn child to receive medical care.

We, Assyrians, are not asking for anything beyond the aid that is already going to Iraq for redevelopment. But we are asking that Assyrians proportionally receive aid sent to the Assyrian regions.

In Northern Iraq, millions of dollars in funding by the United States are assigned to be overlooked by Kurdish political parties who are primarily using these monies for their own advantage instead of a fair and equitable distribution of much needed funds to the Assyrian leadership to be used to aid Assyrian communities that are in dire need.

Today Assyrians are one of the most vulnerable minorities in the world. Under our watch, the largest Assyrian exodus is underway. It is estimated that if things continue to proceed as they now are, within 10 years, the Assyrian population of Iraq will be eradicated because of the ethnic cleansing, the forced exodus, and migration.

The indigenous people of the United States, the American Indians, have their human rights secured in their homeland in America. The indigenous people of Iraq, the Assyrian Christians, are being driven out of their homeland.

The displacement of Assyrians has become a seriously overlooked issue. During the Gulf War thousands fled to Jordan. In 2003, during the early stages of the Iraq War, gripped by fear, 40,000 to 50,000 Assyrians fled to Syria. Since then, thousands have been leaving Iraq because of the threats they have received. Homeless and living on the streets of Syria and Jordan, Assyrians helplessly await assistance.

According to Statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in October 2005 about 700,000 Iraqis fled to Syria. Between October 2003 and March 2005, 36% of these refugees were Christian Iraqi. That's 252,000 Assyrian Christian refugees.

When the Iraq war started, Assyrians did not have a "safe region" to go to within Iraq so naturally they ran to neighboring countries like Syria and Jordan. But since Assyrians are not displaced internally in Iraq, they no longer qualify for the current "displacement" assistance program. These Assyrian refugees who once led productive lives in Iraq, have resorted to

begging, slavery, prostitution, and selling organs just to survive and feed their families. This is happening under our watch in America. The flip side of this is that millions of displaced Kurds are returning with assistance to settle back into their own regions because they, unlike the Assyrians, had a "safe region" to run to within Iraq. We must balance this.

It is an undisputable fact that Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilization and that the Assyrian Christians are the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, present day Iraq. It is also undisputable that Assyrians are a part of the fabric of today's Iraq, enduring under the constraint of Shariia or Islamic law though an in-name-only democratic Iraq.

Article (2)b of the Iraqi Constitution states: "No law can be passed that contradicts the principles of democracy." Article (2)a of the Iraqi Constitution states: "No law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam." These two articles are in contradiction with each other.

One of the rules of Islam, which can be found in the Koran at Chapter 3, line 19, states: "The only true faith in God's sight is Islam." In Chapter 3, line 86, the Koran states: "He that chooses a religion over Islam, it will not be accepted from him and in the world to come he will be one of the lost." Christians having chosen a religion over Islam are considered infidels and idolaters. In Chapter 2, lines 190 to 193, the Koran dictates to all Muslims to "Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is worse than carnage." And so, Christian Churches are bombed and Christians are slain; Assyrian Christians.

Despite being the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, Assyrians are discriminated against and treated as unwanted guests in their own homeland as they face the threat of yet another modern-day ethnic cleansing by the Islamist Kurds that is reminiscent of the ethnic cleansing of nearly a century ago exercised by the then Ottoman Turks and Kurds.

Today's Middle-East must become ethnically balanced. Just like there is a Jewish state, and an Arab state, there is a need for a Christian state.

Although Chapter 4, Article 121 of the Iraqi Constitution entitled "Local Administrations" guarantees the administrative, political, cultural, educational rights for the various ethnicities such as Turkomen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and the other components, this law exists in theory only, and not in practice.

With the Iraqi government's suppression of the rights of Christians, Assyrians are looking to international communities and the western world in particular to the U.S. and U.N. to intervene on their behalf, enabling them to establish their own Assyrian Administrative Region in the Nineveh Plain in order to become, once again, a thriving and healthy community in Iraq. This Assyrian Administrative Region will witness the return of the Assyrian refugees to their ancestral homeland. However, this measure must be taken now. This is not an issue that can be placed on the back burner.

The endangered Assyrian civilization that managed to survive under Genghis Khan, WWI and WWII, is now spiraling out of control towards complete obliteration due to the present ethnic

cleansing, assimilation and forced migration and refugee exodus.

On 9/11 America experienced a reasonably small example of Islamic terrorism as compare to that with which Christians of the Middle-East are familiar. The world watched in horror as we, the citizens of this great nation, mourned our loss. And the world mourned with us. How shameful it would have been if the tragedy of 9/11 had gone unnoticed. How shameful it is that the tragedy of the Assyrian genocide of last century went unnoticed. How shameful it is that the current Assyrian massacres are going unnoticed.

Assyrian Christians Victimized in Iraq

(List compiled by historian and author Fred Aprim)

June 22, 2006

New statistics by the Assyrian Aid Society estimated that 1331 Assyrian Christian families (accounting for about 5561 persons) have fled Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, Ramadi, and Kirkuk and relocated in towns and villages in northern Iraq. The Christians are fleeing because of the lack of security or forced migration. 449 families relocated to Dohuk, 119 families to Barwari Bala, 19 families to Mulla Barwan, 52 families to Aqra, 429 families to Zakho, and 263 families to Sapna. Source: www.nirgalgate.com/asp/v_news.asp?id=2032

June 14, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Iraqi Police harassed and severely beat Assyrian students from Mosul University after final exams, and then held the students down, shaving their heads as a form of public embarrassment, and forced them to walk down the street to further display their "shame" in public. During the previous year the Assyrian students had also been harassed and threatened for being Christians.

Sources: www.khoyada.com/news/news16062006-1.htm; Chaldo-Assyrian Student Union, Nineveh Branch; www.aina.org/news/20060617150016.htm

June 11, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

A bomb explosion in the al-Karrada district in central Baghdad killed 21 year old Assyrian computer engineering student, Ninos Shamuel Adam, four days before receiving his degree from Bet-Nahrain University of Baghdad. He was a straight A student (98 points) and was to study abroad having received a full scholarship for the next academic year. Family members believe that Ninos was the target of anti-Christian and anti-academia hatred that runs rampant in major universities of Iraq. Hundreds of professors and top students in Iraq have already been murdered in the last three years and many Christian students continue to sustain injuries and maltreatment from fellow students and Islamist groups.

Sources: www.zindamagazine.com/ThisWeek/06.18.06/index_sun.php; www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,43708.0.html

June 7, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

Rushd Noel Essa, 26, from the Assyrian quarter of Dora, was killed by a cab bomb in al-Sina'aa quarter in Baghdad. He was a member of the Chaldo-Assyrian Student and Youth Union.

Sources: www.khoyada.com; www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,42944.0.html

June 3, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

33 year old Assyrian woman, Rahima Elias Isha'ya, from the Assyrian town of Karamles was murdered by a group of armed men in the crowded commercial neighborhood of Dargazliyya in Mosul, gunned down in her own perfume and make-up shop.

Sources: www.zindamagazine.com/ThisWeek/06.18.06/index_sun.php; www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,42357.0.html; www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,42289.0.html

June 2, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

Kaneesat al-Si'aood (The Church of Ascension) was attacked by a rocket bomb, causing damage to the church building and a hole in the church dome.

Sources: www.nirgalgate.com/asp/v_news.asp?id=1878; www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,42241.0.html; www.zindamagazine.com/ThisWeek/06.18.06/index_sun.php

June 2, 2006 - Basra, Iraq

Armed men murdered a Christian Assyrian engineer in front of his home in Basra. The victim worked at the al-Najeebiyya Electrical Circuit in al-Ma'aqal. Based on numerous past Christian killings in Basra to force them to leave the city, this murder, too, seems to have religious bases.

Sources: www.iraq4allnews.dk/viewnews.php?id=117594; www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,42201.0.html; www.zindamagazine.com/ThisWeek/06.18.06/index_sun.php

May 30, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

30 year old Raad Joseph, an Assyrian businessman from the Assyrian town of Bar-Tilla, where he ran a weight-training club, was murdered in Mosul. His body was found in the Aysar coast of the industrial district of Mosul. He left behind a wife and child. The killing is believed to be an act of revenge caused by the victim's refusal to give up his business after a bid made by Kurds was rejected in court. An offer of 4 million Iraqi Dinars was made by the competing Kurds a few days prior to the murder.

Sources: Nergal Gate News Agency at www.nirgalgate.com/asp/v_news.asp?id=1879; www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,42240.0.html; www.aina.org/news/20060604142424.htm; www.zindamagazine.com/ThisWeek/06.18.06/index_sun.php

May 25, 2006 - Kirkuk, Iraq

50 year old Assyrian Police Captain Salam Mnati Yousif was shot to death by terrorists while shopping with his wife. He joined the Assyrian Democratic Movement after the liberation of Iraq and was an active member in the Assyrian Community in Kirkuk. He had 6 children.

Source: Assyrian Democratic Movement News

May 17, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Assyrian Abulkarim Hurmiz Bahoda was murdered in a hate crime incident.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,40576.0.html

April 26, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Yousif Odisho Giwargis al-Baylati, 41, was shot and killed in the Assyrian quarters of al-Dawwasa in Mosul, because of his ethnic background. A veteran of the Iraq-Iran war, he was injured in that war.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?PHPSESSID=687d5040ff54563b2926c66a8f89d476&topic=36820.0

April 12, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

James Benyamin, an Assyrian contractor and from the New Baghdad district of Baghdad, was shot and killed by insurgents while working in Balad, about 20 miles east of Baghdad.

Source: www.assyrianvoice.net/news/apr-12-06.htm

April 7, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

The Mujahadeen Council, a leading insurgency group linked to al-Qaeda in Iraq, announced the killing of a Christian Assyrian in Mosul. In a statement posted to the Internet, the group, whose military arm was recently headed by Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, said, "We eliminated him, because this impure crusader offended our noble prophet Mohammed. We killed him in the al-Tahir quarter of Mosul" it read.

Source: www.adnki.com/index_21.evcl.php?cat=Terrorism&loid=8.0.285211908&par=0

April 7, 2006 - Dora, Baghdad, Iraq

Shimshon Awisha (Abu Robi), brother of David and Abbi Awisha, was murdered near the Assyrian Club in Dora district as he was heading home. The killer stepped out from a car, walked towards Mr. Awisha, and shot him dead.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,34731.0.html

April 6, 2006 - Dora, Baghdad, Iraq

Wasan Matti, sister of Fr. Wisam Matti of Mother of God Church, was killed by gunshots by an Islamic terrorist group. She was with her husband and 2 year old daughter in their car, returning home from a doctor's visit. Wasan was six months pregnant and would have celebrated her 30th birthday on April 18th.

Source: Chaldean News Newspaper

April 5, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Assyrian Toma Hurmiz Toma al-Kanni was shot and killed by unidentified assailant(s) while he stood in the garden of his own front yard in the al-Mansour quarter of Mosul.

March 7, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Assyrian Kamil Sulaiman Hurmis, a factory owner in the Dawwasa Assyrian quarter of Mosul, was threatened that unless he paid huge amounts of money, he would be harmed. Rather than give in to the terror, Mr. Hurmis locked his business, left his home and the town for good.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,30362.0.html

March 7, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Assyrian Sinan Abd al-Jabbar, was kidnapped on March 4, 2006 and murdered 3 days later when his family was unable to pay the \$50,000 ransom. His body was found thrown in hay al-Tahrir quarters in Mosul. Sinan was married and had a 5 month old baby.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,30362.0.html

March 6, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Fundamentalist Moslems have been sending threat letters to Assyrian Christians in Mosul in order to force them to leave town or face death.

Source: Telephone call with Giwargis Samuel from Mosul

February 27, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

A car bomb exploded in the al-Ameen quarters of Baghdad at approximately 7 p.m., killing 38 year old Assyrian man, Mahir Toma Oshana. He left behind a wife and 3 young children.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,29435.0.html

February 24, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Assyrian man Ni'mat Mattai Jiddo was killed by fundamentalists in Mosul, leaving behind a wife and 2 children.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,29392.0.html

January 29, 2006 - Baghdad and Kirkuk, Iraq

Six Assyrian churches were bombed in unison. A car bomb detonated at 4:10 p.m. outside St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in the Eastern Baghdad suburb of Sina'a. Twenty minutes later, a car exploded outside the Anglican Church in Eastern Baghdad's Nidhal area. Mar Addai

and Mar Mari Catholic Church in al-Binook and St. Petros and Polous Orthodox Churches were bombed as well. The Church of the Virgin in Kirkuk was bombed at 4:30 p.m. That explosion came 15 minutes after another car bomb exploded outside of St. Ephrem Orthodox Church. Three were confirmed dead, including thirteen-year-old Fadi R. Elias, originally from Alqosh. Many Assyrians were wounded.

Source: www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7002155062

January 29, 2006 - Mosul, Iraq

Muslim students in Mosul University beat tens of Christian students days after a Danish newspaper published caricature drawing of Prophet Mohammad. Muslim clerics in Mosul, under pressure from Islamic militias, issued a fatwa (religious edict/jihad) calling their followers to “expel the Crusaders and infidels from the streets, schools, and institutions because they offended the person of the prophet in Denmark.”

Source: www.elaph.com/ElaphWeb/Politics/2006/1/124132.htm

January 20, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

Yonis Sulaiman Yonan, from the Assyrian town of Karamles, had lived in Baghdad for decades, owning a service business specializing in repairing giant generators and medical equipments, when a stranger asked him to fix his generator. Yonan accompanied the man and never returned home. A message from his cell phone to his son's phone stated that he has been kidnapped.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,25149.0.html

January 20, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

A group of armed men raided the home of the former Iraqi soccer player and coach Emmanuel David, better known as Ammo Baba, in Zayoona, in the center of Baghdad. The 74 year old former coach of the Iraqi National Soccer Team who led Iraq to three titles in the Arabian Gulf Soccer Tournaments and a gold medal at the 1982 Asian Games in India, was recently in ill health, suffering from diabetes, which had led to the amputation of his toes, and very poor vision. He told the police: “The armed men tied me up, blindfolded me, and began beating me.” They stole Baba’s money and belongings.

Sources: Kuwait News Agency (KUNA); www.kuna.net.kw/Story.asp?DSNO=806808

January 17, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq - Tahir Ablahad Qaryo, Iraq

A group disguised in Iraqi National Guard uniforms pushed themselves in the house of Deacon Sami Matti Sliwa (known also as Abu Addison), terrorizing the Assyrian family. After searching the house and finding nothing, they took Deacon Sliwa. Two hours later, they called the family, proclaiming this a hostage kidnapping, demanding ransom. Deacon Sliwa is not a member of any political group or organization and is the sole family provider.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php/topic,24448.0.html

January 7, 2006 - Baghdad, Iraq

The Christian Science Monitor named female US freelancer Jill Carroll as a kidnapped journalist in Baghdad, Iraq. The kidnapping occurred in the western Baghdad’s Adil neighborhood. The body of her Assyrian interpreter, Allan Enwiya, 32, was later found in the same neighborhood. Enwiya was able to tell soldiers that Carroll had been kidnapped before he died from the two bullets in his head.

Sources: www.csmonitor.com/2006/0110/p01s04-woiq.html; riverbendblog.blogspot.com

January 1, 2006 - Dora, Baghdad, Iraq

43 year old Ayad Loqa Lazar of Kirkuk, a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, was murdered by terrorists while on duty in Dora district. Ayad was married and had 2 children.

Source: www.9.sbs.com.au/theworldnews/region.php?id=126622®ion=6

January 1, 2006 - Kirkuk, Iraq

During demonstrations in the Raheem Awa quarter in Kirkuk, where Assyrians and Kurds live, Youkhana Yaqo Youkhana, born 1936 in the Assyrian village of Deri, was accidentally killed by American troops shooting to clear up a demonstration protesting the high fuel prices. Youkhana was headed home from work when he was caught up in the demonstration. Youkhana's son, Emad Youkhana, is a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement.

Source: www.zowaa.org/ns/n1106.htm

December 12, 2005 - Mosul, Northern Iraq

Police Officer Ivan Giwargis Zaia, age 29, was assassinated in al-Sina'aa Quarter in Mosul. He was married with one child. He was an Assyrian.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic,20701.0.html

December 2, 2005 - Kirkuk, Iraq

Sarmad Behnam Ibrahim, age 31, an Assyrian Officer with the Kirkuk Police Department and member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement was murdered while on duty.

Sources: www.ninanews.com/indexar.php?akeija=article&no=1638;
www.islam-online.net/English/News/2005-12/03/article05.shtml

November 29, 2005 - Mosul, Iraq

Gunmen in two cars opened fire on 4 members of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) as these party officials hung Iraqi election posters for the upcoming parliamentary elections in the al-Shuhadaa neighborhood in Northeast Mosul. Two of the Assyrian officials were killed: Yousif Nabil Ishmael from Baghdada, born 1986, and Gewargis Brikha Youkhana from Nahla, born 1980; One was injured: Simon Edmon Youkhana, born 1983; And one is in critical condition with a gunshot wound to the head: Milad Zakkar Mansour, born 1987.

Sources: breakingnews.iol.ie/news/story.asp?j=164175358&p=y64y76x64;
www.cnn.com/2005/US/11/29/tuesday/index.html

November 21, 2005 - al-Ghadeer quarter, Baghdad, Iraq

Baghdad police reported that 4 Assyrian Christian women were killed by a group of armed men storming a Christian home in East Baghdad's al-Ghadeer, a Christian majority quarter.

Source: www.tebayn.com/Tebayn%20Arabic/index.asp?pageID=1&SID=709&Ln=En

November 2, 2005 - Kirkuk, Northern Iraq

At approximately 5:00 p.m., a car bomb exploded near the Church of Mar Giwargis in the Assyrian quarter of Almas district in Kirkuk. One of the three civilian victims was an 18 year old Assyrian Sarmad Fadi Kamil. His father was injured in the explosion.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=16067.0

October 29, 2005 - Kirkuk, Northern Iraq

Kurds shot Oil Engineer, Michael Seeron Michael at his house with 4 bullets to his chest, killing him instantly. Michael, known to his close friends as Mikho, was the executive director for the

northern branch of the Iraqi Oil Company. He had told his friends that members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) threatened him during a visit at his company, demanding that he quit his job and join the Kurdish party. Mikho is survived by 7 sisters scattered around the globe.

Sources: www.christianiraq.com/news/2006/01/11/list-of-reported-assyrians-murdered-in-iraq-in-2005;
www.zindamagazine.com/html/archives/2005/11.9.05/index_wcd.php#surfsup

October 17, 2005 - Tikrit, Northern Baghdad

A group of terrorists attacked an Assyrian family killing Younan Gharib and seriously injuring his wife and brother-in-law. Younan had been living in Syria because of the conditions in Iraq. Having recently returned to Baghdad, he moved to Northern Iraq to live with his extended family in a village near the Iraqi-Turkish border.

Source: www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=16141.0

October 17, 2005 - Baghdad, Iraq

A group of armed men entered the apartment of Nomat'eel Hasra, an Assyrian woman living in the New Baghdad district, in Eastern Baghdad, killing her.

Source: www.elaph.com

September 22, 2005 - Baghdad, Iraq

In the capital's New Baghdad neighborhood, gunmen opened fire on a pickup truck carrying 6 Assyrian security guards assigned to protect Pascale Warda Esho, an Assyrian and former Iraqi Minister of Displacement and Migration. The murdered guards are: two brothers from Dehe, Daniel Nissan Philipos, age 27, and Ninos Nissan Philipos, 30, Mahir Muneb Hanna, 27, from Telkepe, and Johnny Youkhanna David, 30, from Dawedeya. Mr. Nabeel Matti, a commanding officer from Bartilla, was critically injured in the attack.

Source: www.zindamagazine.com

August 26, 2005 - Bartella, Northern Iraq

While pumping gas at a fuel station, 37 year old Nabil Akram Ammona (married with 2 children) died instantly from a gunshot to the head at close range by the KDP peshmerges. When 55 year old Matti Shimon Zora Sha'ya (married with 4 children) attempted to take Ammona to the hospital, he, too, was shot in the head by the same peshmerges, and died.

Source: www.zahrira.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=845

August 14, 2005 - Dora district, Baghdad, Iraq

Ayad Dawood Gergis was driving his car to work when he was killed by unknown gunmen.

Source: Associated Press

August 11, 2005 - Kirkuk, Iraq

Sa'aad Fouzi was kidnapped from the Sonobor Hotel on al-Muhafada Street in Kirkuk. His body was later found stabbed repeatedly and thrown in Kornish Street. Sa'aad was 29 and worked as an engineer for Northern Oil Company.

Source: www.zahrira.net/modules.php?name=news&file=article&sid=739

August 9, 2005 - Baghdad, Iraq

In Baghdad's Dura quarter (al-Mekanik), 22 year old Sargon Esho was shot and killed near Mar Zaia Church while buying groceries.

Source: www.zahrira.net/modules.php?name=news&file=article&sid=739

August 8, 2005 - Mosul, Iraq

While on her way to an Internet Café, Anita Theodoros Harjo, age 29, a student at Nineveh Art Academy, was kidnapped in al-Zohoor quarter. Her body was found thrown in 'Akkab cemetery.

Sources: www.zahrira.net/modules.php?name=news&file=article&sid=739;
www.qmcshrin.com/cng/news/2005/august/assyriankilled.html

August 4, 2005 - Mosul, Iraq

Armed men kidnapped Dr. Noel Petros Shammam Matti, 42, and his brother Amar. Dr. Matti was born in the village of Bartilla. His murdered body was thrown on the side of a road north of Mosul. His brother was released when \$50,000 ransom was paid. Dr. Matti, married with 2 daughters, was a lecturer at the Medical Institute of Mosul University and owned a pharmacy.

Source: www.zahrira.net/modules.php?name=news&file=article&sid=739;
www.ankawa.com/forum/index.php?topic=5790.0

July 22, 2005 - Baghdad, Iraq

According to police and medical officials, gunmen fired at a car carrying newlyweds and their families, killing the bride, Salay, 22, wounding her mother, the groom, Wisam Abdul Wahad, 24, and the driver, Marcel Ishoo, in the southern Dora neighborhood of Baghdad.

Source: www.zindamagazine.com, July 23, 2005 issue

July 16, 2005 - Habbaniya, Ramadi, Iraq

An explosion rocked the Assyrian Church in Habbaniya, Ramadi in Iraq.

Source: www.christianiraq.com/news/2006/01/11/list-of-reported-assyrians-murdered-in-iraq-in-2005

July 7, 2005 - Baghdad, Iraq

An Assyrian Christian owner of a Liquor shop was killed instantly after being shot by an armed man in front of his store in al-Karrada quarter in center Baghdad.

Source: www.iraq4allnews.dk/viewnews.php?id=90021

July 3, 2005 - Baghdad, Iraq

Younadam Youkhana Shimun, age 42, was attacked and killed in a hate crime. His son was also injured. Mr. Shimun was married and had two sons and a daughter.

Source: Assyrian Democratic Movement Weekly News

June 2, 2005 - Kirkuk, Iraq

A car bomb exploded in the Arapha Assyrian quarter. 5 year old Randy Robert Alexin, riding with his parents in their own car was killed immediately, while both his parents were injured. Funeral services were held at St. George Church in Almas quarter.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=4370

June 1, 2005 - Mosul, Nineveh Province, Iraq

Ghassan Fahmi, 28, owner of Ghassan's D.J. and Recording business, in the al-Zuhoor quarter, was kidnapped by an unidentified group from his place of business. Two hours later, his murdered body was returned.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=4357

May 18, 2005 - Mosul, Nineveh Province, Iraq

Laith Zuhair Gibraeil Hoodi, 28, was killed when a rocket hit his home in al-Sukkar quarters in

Mosul. His mother Fatimah abd al-Ahad was hit by many splinters in her arms, legs, and other parts of her body. She remains in critical condition at the hospital.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=26&topic=586

April 24, 2005 - Dora, Baghdad, Iraq

Ishaq Habib Kola, 52, from Alqosh, was killed by a bullet while inside his home. Ishaq had worked in the medical field for 25 years, dedicating his life to helping others. He was married with 4 children. His aged father was visiting from Alqosh as Ishaq died in his arms.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=3955

March 27, 2005 - Mosul, Iraq

Kifah Mattai Ibrahim was kidnapped on March 3, 2005 and found murdered in Mosul 24 days later. He was 43 and married. He ran his own stone factory business in Mosul.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=3633

March 23, 2005 - Dora, Baghdad, Iraq

Karim Elia Abouna, an Assyrian originally from Alqosh, was murdered in the Assyrian quarter of Dora, Baghdad. An armed group of men entered his shop and shot him five times.

Source: www.ankawa.com

March 15, 2005 - Basra, Iraq

Some 30 hooded members of Mugtada al-Sadr (al-Mahdi Army) attacked a group of Basra University Engineering students who were on a picnic at al-Andalus Park, and beat them with batons and sticks "in the name of Islam." One Christian student, Zahra Ashor, was killed and 15 others badly injured. When a fellow student attempted to help Zahra, he was shot in the head. At least 20 students were kidnapped and taken to Sadr's office in al-Tuwaisa for "interrogation." The gang stole the students' personal belongings, cell phones and jewelry, and destroyed the tape recorder and music tapes of the Assyrians. The attacks were carried out because the students were listening to music and the females were not wearing the Islamic hijab (veil).

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=32&topic=1907

March 16, 2005 - Kirkuk, Iraq

Iraqi News Agency reported that General Wael Yousif Yacoub, an Assyrian engineer from Telkepe, was assassinated while returning home from Baghdad. Eyewitnesses saw armed men surround the general's car and shoot him. He worked as an officer in the Internal Affairs Department of the Kirkuk Police and was credited with the re-opening of the Kirkuk Police Force after the fall of Saddam Hussein. General Yacoub represented the Christian voice in affairs dealing with the local Police Board and was a former officer of the Iraqi Army. Well respected in his community, General Yacoub was also a Deacon at the Chaldean Catholic Cathedral in Kirkuk. Recently General Yacoub had been openly criticizing the Kurdish position on the ownership of the city of Kirkuk. He became a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement after the liberation of Iraq on April 9, 2003. He was married and with 2 daughters. Islamist Ansar al-Sunna army has announced responsibility for the killing.

Sources: www.zindamagazine.com (3/16/2005 issue); iraq4allnews.dk/viewnews.php?id=80989

December 2004 - Iraq

Hundreds of Christian families are escaping to Syria and Jordan before the arrival of Christmas

and the New Year Festivities as they fear increased acts of killings against them.

Source: www.elaph.com/Politics/2004/12/27349.htm

December 11, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Sabah Hurmiz of Alqosh (married, 3 children) and his friend Saalim Potrus Daddaya of Batnaya (married, 2 children) were reported missing and found dead 3 days later at a Mosul hospital.

Sources: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2424;
www.elaph.com/Politics/2004/12/27349.htm

December 9, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Two Assyrian Christians, Fawzi Soorish Luqa of 'Ankawa, 43, and Haitham Yousuf Saka of Bartella, who owned a hall used for celebrations in Baghdad, were kidnapped from their place of business and murdered by an unidentified terrorist group.

Sources: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2399;
www.elaph.com/Politics/2004/12/27349.htm

December 8, 2004 - Ramadi, Iraq

Dr. Ra'aad Augustine Qoryaqos, a notable Assyrian of Bartella, a prominent surgeon, and a professor at the College of Medicine in al-Anbar University, was murdered by 3 terrorists who stormed his clinic while he was checking on patients. He left behind a wife and 2 children.

Sources: www.bartella.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=1831;
www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2397

December 7, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Al-Tahira Chaldean Catholic Church, one of the most beautiful churches in the al-Shifa' neighborhood, Eastern Mosul was destroyed when 10 armed men stormed the church, planted explosives throughout, and set the bombs off wounding three people. An hour later, gunmen bombed an Armenian church under construction in the al-Wahda neighborhood, Western Mosul.

Sources: story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=586&e=4&u=/nm/20041207/w1_nm/iraq;
www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,140751,00.html; www.peyamner.com

December 2, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Laith Antar Khanno of Baghdeda, 29, had worked for a foreign company in Baghdad and had traveled to Mosul to open a branch there. He was kidnapped for a ransom of \$1,000,000, later reduced to \$100,000. His family unable to pay, his headless body was found two weeks later near Mosul Hospital in the al-Wahda quarter, East of Mosul. His head was found later at another location. Khanno had been married for three years and had a daughter.

Sources: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2329

December 2, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Imad Jameel Younan, 29, married with two children, from the Assyrian town of Baghdeda, was confronted by criminals who murdered him and stole his private taxi.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2325

November 30, 2004 - Salah al-Din

Baiji refinery driver, Sabih Mousa Abada of the Assyrian town of Baghdeda, 55, married, 5 sons, 3 daughters, stopped to help a stalled school bus when a car bomb exploded on a nearby road.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2325

November 21, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Sami Esho Khoshaba, 19, a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, was a cadre in the al-Karkh Branch in Baghdad. He was shot and killed in Mosul, while on leave.

Source: www.christiansofiraq.com/update.html;
www.zindamagazine.com/html/archives/2004/11.23.04/index_tuc.php#SurfsUp

November 21, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Essarhadon Elia al-Qas Oraham, 27, married with a 2 year old daughter, was shot and killed near al-Mashriq Club in Camp Sara quarter by 2 assailants, attempting to steal his vehicle.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2256

November 19, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

2 Assyrian brothers, Muntadir As'aad Matti and Bashar As'aad Matti, from the town of Bartella were killed when a bomb fell on the shop where they worked at the Mosul market.

Source: www.bartella.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=1669&sid=be7b477051b949a1465606ea30fda461

November 8, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

According to the U.S. military, the first of 2 bombs went off near the Mar Giwargis (St. George) Church, injuring 18 people. The second car bomb detonated minutes later, less than a mile away, outside the St. Matthew Church, killing three people and wounding 34.

Sources: CBS News; ABC News; FOX News (Brit Hume Special Report, 3:05 p.m.); www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2154; Daily Times; Reuters (NY); Los Angeles Times; www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov2004/n11082004_2004110811.html

November 4, 2004 - Falluja, Iraq

Dr. Nadia Hanna Murqos was killed near Falluja while returning from Syria. Her husband and son were injured in the attack on their car.

Sources: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2123

November 2, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Sargon, son of the Assyrian poet and writer Odisho Malko, was kidnapped in Dora. The family had to give the kidnapers their private car and pay a ransom to secure Sargon's release.

Sources: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2102

November 2, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

An Assyrian family in Dora, Meekanik quarter, in Southern Baghdad, 'Alaa' Andrawis, 39, his wife Evelyn Malkizdaq, and their 10 year old son were shot at while in their car. Father and son were killed instantly. The mother sustained severe injuries to the head and underwent surgery. The parents had 2 other children. 15 days earlier, Andrawis' cousin, Yasmin Boodagh, and daughter were killed in Dora by a car bomb.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2102

October 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Three Assyrian girls were murdered in the Mechanic district in Baghdad for not wearing the Islamic Hijab (veil) or for "dressing improperly."

Source: www.nineveh.com

October 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Assyrian neighborhoods are receiving flyers instructing them to convert to Islam. One flyer urged Assyrians to mark in the special boxes at the bottom of the flyer whether they are converting to Sunni or Shi'aa. One Assyrian with 8 family members had to mark 4 shi'aa and 4 Sunni to avoid antagonizing either sect. Although he did not convert to Islam, he had to respond to this flyer per instructions, from fear of death or injury to his family.

Source: An Assyrian caller from Baghdad wishing to remain anonymous

October 30, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Three men, two of whom were masked, confronted Ma'an Yousuf, an Assyrian man and killed him in his electrical supplies shop on Dawwasa Street in Mosul with three bullets to the head.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2078

October 25, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

4 unidentified armed men tried to force themselves inside the home of Nasrin Shaba Murad, an Assyrian Christian woman in Mosul. When the 42 year old housewife and mother of 3 tried to escape to her neighbor's house, the gunmen opened fire and killed her.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2019

October 21, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

The Mosul Municipal Office is continuing its unfair practice of selling lands belonging to Assyrian Christians right from under them and renting the lands to others.

Sources: October 21, 2004 interview of al-Hayat with Yonadam Kanna, Assyrian representative in the Iraqi National Assembly; www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1975

October 21, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Layla Elias Kakka Essa (30's) lived peacefully in Baghdad. Economical hardship forced her to become an instant translator in the Assyrian quarter of Dora in Baghdad to support her 2 young children, Manar and Mina. She was killed in cold blood while on her way home after completing her 10th day of employment. The killer mercilessly emptied his bullets in her head.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2029

October 20, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Many Assyrian Christian families have been slaughtered and killed. Mosul University imposes strange and unreasonable customs on the students. Hundreds of families have abandoned the city of Mosul and moved to Dohuk and other neighboring towns.

Sources: The 18th Session of the Iraqi National Assembly addressing the escalating troubles in Mosul, as reported to the al-Sabah al-Jadeed (The New Morning) by Yonadam Kanna, Assyrian representative of the Iraqi National Assembly; www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1969

October 18, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Yasmin Boodagh, and her daughter were killed in Dora by a car bomb. 15 days later her cousin 'Alaa' Andrawis and his 10 year old son were also shot to death.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=2102

October 16, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

1500 Chaldo-Assyrian Syriac students from Mosul University decided to no longer attend classes because of the repeated harassment and threats they have been receiving from terrorists and

Islamists taking advantage of the non-stability and chaotic management at the university.

Sources: www.iraq4allnews.dk/viewnews.php?id=67686&ure;
www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_041022xt.shtml

October 16, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

In a coordinated strike against the Assyrian Christian community, the Church of St. Joseph in the west of Baghdad was hit at about 4:00 am. 20 minutes later, another blast ripped through the streets at another St. Joseph Church in Dora, southern Baghdad. 20 minutes later, St. Paul Church was struck in Dora. At 4:50 am, the Roman Catholic St. George Church in the central district of Karrada was rocked by a blast and engulfed in flames, leaving the wood-built sanctuary completely charred. A 5th explosion occurred about an hour later at St. Thomas Church in Mansour, to the west. The violence resumed later when an artillery shell was fired into a car parked between a hotel and St. George Anglican Church, said witnesses & US soldiers.

Sources: AFP; news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3749520.stm

October 5, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Dr. Sanabel Noel Al-Tabakh, an Assyrian Christian, was killed in al-Wahda district of the city of Mosul on her way to work.

Sources: www.aliraqi.org/forums/showthread.php?t=39812; www.nineveh.com

October 5, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Social service workers, Taghreed Abd al-Masih Ishaq and her sister Hala, were killed in Mosul. They were residents and natives of the Assyrian town of Bartilla, in the Nineveh Governorate.

Sources: www.aliraqi.org/forums/showthread.php?t=39812; www.nineveh.com

October 5, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Tara Majeed Putrus, a social service worker was shot in Mosul.

Sources: www.themesopotamian.org/murder_and_oppression.htm; www.nineveh.com;
www.aliraqi.org/forums/showthread.php?t=39812

October 5, 2004 - Iraq

The Secretary General of the Society for Threatened Peoples, Tilman Zuelch who was in Iraq, reported that 20 Chaldo-Assyrian Christians were killed in September 2004 by Islamic terrorists and 80 more since May 2003. He also reported that 40,000 Assyrians have left Iraq for Syria and Jordan, and that Christian families in central and southern Iraq have lost all hope of living in peace among the Arabs.

Source: www.epd.de (in Göttingen)

October 5, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

15 year old Fadi 'Aaid Khidir Shamoon was kidnapped in the 'Ain 'alaq orchards in Ba'asheeqa while riding a bike his father had given him. He was found in the most horrific manner. Fadi was barbarically mutilated, burned, beheaded, and thrown onto the Ba'asheeqa-Teez Kharab road in front of al-'Azzawi ranch. Earlier, Ba'asheeqa mourned another son, 14 year old Julian Afram Yacoub when he was hit in the head with a concrete block and then burned. The murderers have been targeting innocent children, forcing many Christians to flee their homes and villages.

Sources: www.bahzani.net; www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1855

October 4, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Gunmen opened fire on Hazim Sako (Abu Sarmad), the owner of a liquor store in the Assyrian populated Dawasa district in Mosul, and on his family. Sako died, while his family members struggle for their lives at the hospital.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1852

September 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

An Islamic group under Salah al-Deen al-Ayoubi, a Kurd, took responsibility for beheading 2 Assyrian men, Raymond Farooq Shimun, and Mosul University graduate Firas Hadi Potrus, 26. A CD depicting the beheading was distributed with no indication as to date. Al-Ayoubi reported that his group was a Kurdish Islamist trying to force Assyrians out of their ancestral lands.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1719

September 23, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Pamphlets were distributed at Mosul University and covered the campus walls carrying the threatening message that an acid solution would be thrown at the face of any Christian girl not covered with the Islamic hijab (veil) in the new school year. The pamphlets stressed that the threats were not directed at Moslem girls. Earlier, the faces of 2 Christian girls were burned with acid in the popular gold blacksmith market in Mosul. Assyrian girls fear attending university this year.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1810

September 27, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

At least 9 Assyrians were killed and others critically injured when a bus carrying employees of the Baghdad Hunting Club (Nadi al-Sayd) was attacked by unidentified gunmen early morning as employees left work for home. The 9 killed Assyrians are: 'Aamer Nissan (born 1968), 'Aadel Nissan (born 1972), Amer Khoshaba (born 1965), Emanuel Nissan (born 1945), Maradona Emanuel (born 1984), Na'aeem Gewargis (born 1978), Bassam Elias (born 1982), Rasim Elias (born 1984), and Amir Shabo.

Sources: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1795; Agence France Presse

September 11, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

A car bomb exploded outside the Virgin Mary Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the Al-Sa'doun Park in the center of Baghdad. Eyewitnesses could not tell if the explosion was an act of a suicide bomber or if the car exploded by remote control.

Source: www.f21.parsimony.net/forum37811/messages/32035.htm

September 10, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Following celebration of Holy Cross Day, a mortar attack was launched on the inhabitants of the Assyrian town of Bakhdeda, in the Qaraqosh, Hamdaniya District. Three of the many mortars fell on roofs of homes where several Assyrians were injured while sleeping. 13 year old Mark Louis Sheeto was killed and his mother, Bushra Toma Sheeto, and his 8 year old brother Bihnam Sheeto sustained serious injuries. This attack seems to be part of a string of attacks planned to drive the native Assyrians out of their homeland. Bakhdeda (whose name was changed to Hamdaniya by the Saddam Regime as part of the Arabization process) was felt to be a prime target as it houses over 30,000 Assyrians and is at the heartland of the Assyrian region.

Source: www.aina.org/news/20040911181922.htm

September 10, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

A bomb exploded at the Assyrian Anglican Church on al-Andalus Street in Baghdad.

Source: www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/PER170744.htm

September 2, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

In the al-Mayasa (al-Sa'aa) Christian district, the Assyrian Boulos brothers, known as the sons of Hasina, were famed for their patriotic stance in Mosul while defending and assisting other Assyrians. Khaled Boulos, 32, and his brother Hani Boulos, 28, were killed instantly when armed terrorists drove up to them, exited the car, and began heavy firing.

Sources: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1631;
f21.parsimony.net/forum37811/messages/31996.htm

September 1, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Gewargis Youaresh Nisan was killed in the heavily Assyrian populated district of Karrada (Arkhit) when a terrorist time-bomb exploded.

Source: f21.parsimony.net/forum37811/messages/32000.htm

September 1, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

In a terrorist attack on the Governorate of Nineveh building, Nisan Sliyo Shmoel, of the Assyrian Patriotic Party was injured. He was taken to a hospital, treated and released. However, the terrorists were awaiting his release just outside the hospital where he was struck with an unmarked car with no plates. Shmoel, 43, married with 5 daughters and 1 son, died at the scene.

Source: f21.parsimony.net/forum37811/messages/31999.htm

August 31, 2004 - Bartella, Iraq

3 Assyrian women in their 20's, Tara Majeed Betros Al-Hadaya, Taghrid Abdul-Massih Ishaq Betros and her sister Hala Abdul-Massih Ishaq Betros were slaughtered in the Assyrian village of Bartella near Mosul while returning home from work at a hospital in Mosul. Another Assyrian woman, Amera Nouh Sha'ana, who was also returning home to Bartella and an Assyrian driver, Naji Betros Ishaq were injured in the attack. Few days earlier, terrorists left CDs in the region filming the slaughter of two other Christians from the same town.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1631

August 1, 2004 - Baghdad and Mosul, Iraq

5 Assyrian and 1 Armenian churches were bombed simultaneously in Baghdad and Mosul. 12 Assyrians were killed and some 60 injured. The churches were: Assyrian Catholic Church of Sayidat al-Najat (Our Lady of Salvation) in Karrada, Baghdad; Armenian Catholic Church of Sayidat al-Zohour (Our Lady of the Flowers) in Karrada, Baghdad; Chaldean Catholic Church Seminary of St. Peter & Paul in Doura, al-Meeekanik quarters, Baghdad; St. Paul Church in center of Mosul; Chaldean Catholic Church of St. Elia in Ni'aayriyya oo Gayyara, New Baghdad; and St. Mary's Church in East Baghdad.

Source: www.nineveh.com

July 19, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

Unidentified attackers with automatic weapons attempted to kidnap an Assyrian man, Hani Yohanna Naom, 43, near his convenient shop on Dawasa Street, near the government building. As he tried to escape from his kidnappers, he was shot and killed.

Source: www.ado-world.org/en/news.php?id=336&lang=ar

July 17, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

An unidentified group using automatic weapons entered a pizza shop at the al-Zihoor quarter shooting and killing Adeb Aqrawi, an Assyrian young man, working at the shop.

Source: www.ado-world.org/cn/news.php?id=336&lang=ar

July 11, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

2 Assyrian children from the Chaldean Catholic Church, Sami, age 6, and Rami, age 4, were killed in front of their home when rockets fell in their neighborhood in the center of Baghdad.

Sources: London - Al - Sharq Al-Awsat Newspaper, July 11, 2004;

www.ado-world.org/cn/iraq.php?id=175&lang=ar;

www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1205

July 11, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Terrorists entered an Assyrian Christian home shooting 16 year old Raneed Raad and her sister, 6 year old Raphid at point blank range while their parents were out. The Assyrian family had reported being threatened but no measures were taken to protect them.

Source: www.assyrianchristians.com/commentary_massacre_july_11_04.htm

June 26, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

2 unidentified persons in a silver Opel threw a hand bomb at the Holy Spirit Church (al-Rooh al-Qudos) in the Akha' quarter in Mosul. The explosion caused injury to the sister of Fr. Ragheed, the church priest.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1162

June 23, 2004 - Basra, Iraq

2 Assyrian sisters, Janet and Shatha Sadah Odisho, ages 38 and 25, were shot dead in a car while returning home from work in Basra. The two worked for Bechtel, a U.S. company.

Sources: www.reuters.com/newsArticle.jhtml?type=topNews&storyID=5492570;

news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/nm/20040623/ls_nm/iraq_daughters_dc_2;

www.ado-world.org/en/iraq.php?id=173&lang=ar

June 20, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

5 armed men kidnapped 22 year old Raymond Farouq Shimun, son of Farouq and Juliet Shimun, not far from his home in Mosul. 3 days later his body was thrown in a cemetery in a valley outside the city. His head was partially cut and his hands and legs were smashed. Cuts and knife wounds on his body suggested that he suffered before he died.

Sources: www.christianiraq.com/news/2004/12/19/violence-against-christians-in-iraq-special-report-updated-list;

www.christiansofiraq.com/update.html; www.ahraqi.org/forums/showthread.php?t=39812

June 16, 2004 - Iraq

Edmond Anwar (Sulaymaniya) lost much money and merchandise when his alcohol and cigarette shop was robbed.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1091

June 10, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Janan Joseph, an Assyrian Christian, was shot and killed inside his home in al-Mansour quarter along with 10 other Christians in the quarter.

Source: www.sotaliraq.com/newiraq/article_2004_07_19_4004.html

June 7, 2004 - Dora, Baghdad, Iraq

Drive-by shooting resulted in the deaths of 4 Assyrians and 2 Armenians: Esho Nisan Marqos, Ramziya Enwiya Youkhanna, Duraid Sabri Hanna, Alice Aramays, Aaida Bedros Boughos, Munah Jalal Karim.

Sources: www.zindamagazine.com June 14, 2004 issue; www.aina.org/news/20040614200324.htm

June 4, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Faraj Moshe Markhai, was kidnapped and ultimately murdered.

Source: www.ankawa.com/cgi-bin/ikonboard/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=1090

May 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

An Assyrian woman, Nahrain Yonaan was blinded and her face badly wounded, from a drive-by attack and bombing.

Sources: Los Angeles Times 5/21/2004; www.zindamagazine.com 5/24/2004 issue

May 28, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

Ashor Goriel Yalda was killed in his car by a grenade while on his way to work.

Sources: www.nineveh.com; www.christiansofiraq.com/update.html;
www.themesopotamian.org/murder_and_oppression.htm

April 4, 2004 - Miqdadiya, Iraq

Emad Mikha of Detroit was killed while working with the U.S. Army as a civilian translator.

Sources: www.zindamagazine.com issue 4/12/2004; Detroit Free Press, 4/13/2004

March 26, 2004 - Kirkuk, Iraq

Lieutenant Romeo Esha David, a member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, was killed in his home.

Source: www.zindamagazine.com issue 3/29/2004

March 22, 2004 - Dora, Baghdad, Iraq

An Assyrian elderly man Ameerjoo Barama and his wife Jewded were brutally murdered in their own home by Militants in the town of Dora, near Baghdad, Iraq. The husband's throat was slashed and the wife was struck repeatedly on the head.

Sources: www.zindamagazine.com; aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

March 17, 2004 - Baghdad, Iraq

An Assyrian family was killed and others wounded after a bomb attack: mother Marta Eskharia, father Odisho, son Farid, whose his wife was severely wounded, son Zaia, older daughter Shmoni who survived because she was in Dohuk, however, her daughter was severely wounded.

Source: www.aina.org/bbs/index.cgi?read=21336

February 17, 2004 - Ankawa, Iraq

At the Ankawa Boys High School a group of students from the Kurdistan Student Union entered classes against school regulations while classes were in session, distributing applications to student to join the Kurdistan Student Union. The Chaldo-Assyrian Students and Youth Union protested the inappropriate, illegal, and unfair activities that disrupted student studies.

Source: www.zindamagazine.com

February 11, 2004 - Mosul, Iraq

The Associated Press reported that Gunmen firing from a car attacked an office of the Assyrian Democratic Party in Mosul, injuring one security guard, according to member Napoleon Fatou.
Sources: Associated Press; aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

January 25, 2004 - Basra, Iraq

Bahra Newspaper reported that Dr. Sarmad Samee was shot in Basra.
Source: Bahra Newspaper; aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

January 24, 2004 - Telkepeh, Iraq

An attempted assassination was made on Wathah Gorgis, Mayor of the Telkepeh District in Northern Iraq while in his car returning from Mosul after meeting with the Governor of Nineveh. His car was met with sprays of bullets near the Dentistry College of Mosul. The Mayor lives in the village of Telkepeh which includes several Chaldo-Assyrian villages but has seen its Christian population drop from 98% to 50% with 4 mosques built and a 5th underway.
Source: aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

January 22, 2004 - Iraq

Terrorists attacked Elishwa Bedel Naser.
Assyrian Star magazine Winter 2003 issue; www.nineveh.com; www.christiansofiraq.com/update.html;
<http://www.ashurtv.org/vaac/vaac04.htm>; <http://www.aina.org/bbs/index.cgi?noframes>;
<http://www.aliraqi.org/forums/showthread.php?t=39812>

January 21, 2004 - Falluja, Ramadi, Iraq

4 women were killed and 5 others injured. The Christian victims worked at a nearby U.S. military base in Habbaniyah in the laundry.
Source: Associated Press

December 2003 - Basra, Iraq

Assyrians are leaving Basra because of terror and killings.
Source: www.sotaliraq.com/file/article_2003_12_30_44158y.html

December 24, 2003 - Basra, Iraq

Bashir Toma Elias was killed by a single shot to the head.
Sources: Reuters; www.zindamagazine.com/12/29/2003 issue;
www.sotaliraq.com/file/article_2003_12_30_44158y.html

November 20, 2003 - Mosul, Iraq

Leaflets were found demanding Christian students to either become Muslim or face death at schools in Baghdad and Mosul in Northern Iraq.
Source: ASSIST News Service; aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

November 18, 2003 - Basra, Iraq

Sargon Nano, the Assyrian Democratic Movement (Zowaa) representative in Basra was killed.
Source: www.zindamagazine.com/11/17/2003 issue

November 4, 2003 - Mosul, Iraq

Ismail Yousif Sadeq, an Assyrian judge, was assassinated outside his home.
Source: www.zindamagazine.com/11/3/2003 issue

October 20, 2003 - Kirkuk, Iraq

A rocket-propelled grenade hit the office of the Assyrian Democratic Movement in Kirkuk. Jevan Jerjes, 29, was injured.

Source: www.zindamagazine.com; aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

October 12, 2003 - Falluja, Iraq

Danny Isaac and William Cesar were killed in front of their homes.

Source: www.zindamagazine.com 10/20/2003 issue

October 7, 2003 - Mosul, Iraq

A liquor store was attacked by an RPG grenade killing Safa Sabah Khoshi and critically injuring his cousin Meyaser Karim Khoshi.

Source: aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

October 3, 2003 - Khaldiya, Iraq

Napoleon and his son were killed in front of their home.

Sources: Associated Press, October 3, 2003; www.zindamagazine.com 10/6/2003 issue

August 19, 2003 - Tikrit, Iraq

Nadan Yonadam of Modesto, California was killed while working with the U.S. Army as a civilian translator.

Source: www.zindamagazine.com issue 9/1/2003 issue

July 19, 2003 - Mosul, Iraq

16 year old Hilda Zuhair Istifan was kidnapped in front of her home in the Muthana district of Mosul. Muhamad Thiya Al-din Jasim, a cousin of Saddam Hussain, and the son of a high-ranking army official in Saddam's army carried out the kidnapping. Muhamad's uncle was the director of Saddam's terrorist army group, Fida'yeen Saddam.

Source: aina.org/releases/20040613151448.htm

July 17, 2003 - Baghdad, Iraq

Husam George Tobeya, 31, married with one son was shot dead at a gas station in Baghdad. Consequently, his wife left Iraq. She and her son are currently in Jordan waiting to immigrate to the United States.

Sources: www.nineveh.com; <http://www.ashurtv.org/vaac/vaac03.htm>;
www.aliraqi.org/forums/showthread.php?t=39812

April 10, 2003 - Kirkuk, Iraq

Hazim Petrus Damman, a chemical engineer, was killed during a Kurdish raid.

Sources: www.zindamagazine.com 4/28/2004 issue; www.aina.org/releases/karkukmosul.htm

February 22, 2001 - Arbil, Northern Iraq

In a Press Release, Senator John J. Nimrod, Secretary General of the Assyrian Universal Alliance condemned the barbaric act of those who executed the inhumane murder of Fransu Hariri, the Assyrian governor of Arbil in Northern Iraq, and further reported that acts of violence against Assyrians in Iraq are continuing and they are denied human rights.

Source: AUA News Watch; AUA Press Release, 2/22/01

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Malek-Yonan, thank you for that very powerful testimony. You point out no one is taking notice. The reason we invited you and wanted you here was to try to begin rectifying that, and to raise this issue with our own Government and other coalition partners, and the Iraqis. Your testimony will be used I can assure you to try to rectify it.

Ms. MALEK-YONAN. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Bigelow.

STATEMENT OF MS. KIT BIGELOW, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHAI'S OF THE UNITED STATES

Ms. BIGELOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We also have submitted a written statement which we hope will be accepted, and I have a summary.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. BIGELOW. My name is Kit Bigelow, Director of External Affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States. I would like to thank the Subcommittee for asking us to testify about the situations of the Baha'i communities in Iran and Egypt.

We would also like to thank Congress for its long-time support. It has passed eight concurrent resolutions on the Iranian Baha'is. Congressmen Kirk and Lantos have just introduced H.Con.Res. 415. We hope even more Members will become cosponsors and wish to express our gratitude to Congressmen Hyde and Smith, cosponsors of several resolutions and main supporters in efforts to assist Iranian Baha'is.

The Baha'i communities in Egypt and Iran are threatened by deliberate government strategies dedicated to their eventual destruction. In both cases, the situations have recently worsened.

In Iran, where the Baha'i Faith began in the 19th century, Baha'is are the largest religious minority with 300,000 to 350,000 people. The Islamic regime regards the Baha'i Faith as apostasy and Baha'is as "unprotected infidels" with no legal rights.

Since 1979, more than 10,000 have been dismissed from their jobs. Baha'is have been barred from institutions of higher education, and more than 200 Baha'is have been killed or summarily executed, and thousands more jailed.

During the past 2 years, there has been an increase in arbitrary arrests, the destruction of historic religious sites, and other pressures of the type not experienced since the years immediately following the Islamic revolution. More than 120 Baha'is await trial after having been imprisoned. A Baha'i died in prison after 10 years on charges of apostasy. The government-sponsored newspaper, *Kayhan*, has been running a campaign of vilification on the Baha'i Faith.

One of the most ominous signs of the government's intentions was exposed on March 20, and has been referred to by previous speakers. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief made public a confidential letter from Iran's armed forces calling for Baha'is to be identified and monitored. The Anti-Defamation League called these actions "reminiscent of the steps taken against Jews in Europe."

On May 19, 54 Baha'is were arrested in the City of Shiraz. It was one of the largest mass arrests of Baha'is since the 1980s.

The Baha'i community in Egypt traces its roots to the 1860s. In 1925, a supreme religious court of Cairo ruling was the first official recognition in the Muslim world of the Baha'i Faith as an independent religion. In 1960 President Nasser signed Presidential Decree 263 banning Baha'i activities. The ban remains law today.

Baha'is have faced several episodes of arrests and imprisonment, the most recent being in 2001, and remain under constant police surveillance.

The Egyptian Baha'i community has diminished by 90 percent to 500 people. The Baha'i Faith has been the subject of numerous fatwas. The most recent fatwa by the Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar University described the Baha'i Faith as "a lethal spiritual epidemic in the fight against which the state must mobilize all its contingencies to annihilate it."

The crisis immediately before the Baha'is concerns identification cards which must be obtained by each Egyptian citizen by the end of 2006. The cards must be used for any type of government service and are needed to pass through police checkpoints. These cards require citizens to state one of Egypt's three recognized religions: Islam, Christianity or Judaism.

In the past, Baha'is had been permitted to leave the religious space blank, to make a dash or to write other. On April 4 an Egyptian administrative court found the Baha'is had the right to obtain government issued documents that state their religion. The Ministry of the Interior appealed that ruling. The Supreme Administrative Court has suspended implementation of the ruling pending an appeal to be heard on September 16.

In Egypt, the ultimate hope of the Baha'i community is the rescinding of Presidential Decree 263. Our plea is for that government to allow all of its citizens to be treated as equal. We appeal again to the Iranian Government not to implement its plan to identify and monitor the Baha'is and to permit them freely to practice their religion.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the U.S. Government for speaking out here and at the UN, and hope Congress will continue loudly to voice its concern for the religious freedom of all people. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bigelow follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. KIT BIGELOW, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'IS OF THE UNITED STATES

My name is Kit Bigelow, director of the Office of External Affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States. We would like to thank the House Committee on International Relations' Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Relations for asking us to testify today about the situations of the Bahá'í communities in Iran and Egypt.

We would like to take this opportunity also to thank Congress for its longtime support of Iran's beleaguered Bahá'í community. In 1982, 1984 and 1988 there were hearings on the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'is. Since 1982, Congress has passed eight concurrent resolutions calling for the emancipation of that Bahá'í community. Representatives Kirk and Lantos have just introduced H.Con.Res. 415, once again condemning the deliberate mistreatment of the Bahá'is in Iran. We hope as many Members as possible will become cosponsors. We wish to express our particular gratitude to Congressman Smith, who has cosponsored six of those resolutions and

has been a main supporter in Congress' efforts to assist the Iranian Bahá'í community.

Iran has been designated a "Country of Particular Concern" by the U.S. Government for its "egregious violations of religious freedom." Egypt is on the Watch List of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The Bahá'í communities in Egypt and Iran are both threatened by deliberate, long-term and well-documented government strategies dedicated to their eventual destruction. In both cases, the threats have recently become more dire, and the situations more urgent.

PERSECUTION IN IRAN

In Iran, where the Bahá'í Faith began in the 19th century, Bahá'ís constitute the largest religious minority. Some 300,000–350,000 Bahá'ís live in all regions of the country. However, the Bahá'í Faith is not recognized as a legitimate religion: the Islamic regime regards it as apostasy and as a conspiracy. As "unprotected infidels," Bahá'ís have no legal rights.

By order of the Iranian Government, Bahá'ís are not permitted to elect leaders, and they have been barred from institutions of higher education since 1980. According to Iranian law, Bahá'í blood can be spilled with impunity. They are not allowed to worship collectively. Bahá'ís are also denied jobs and pensions: more than 10,000 have been dismissed from government and university posts since 1979. All cemeteries, holy places and community properties were seized soon after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Many properties have been destroyed, and none have been returned. The right of Bahá'ís to inherit is denied. Since 1996, Bahá'ís have been strictly forbidden to seek probate. In the years immediately following the Islamic Revolution, more than 200 Bahá'ís were killed or summarily executed, and thousands more were jailed.

The elimination of the Bahá'í community of Iran is explicit government policy. A secret Iranian Government document published by the U.N. Human Rights Commission in 1993 outlines the official strategy to suppress the Bahá'í community. Written by the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council and signed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, this document dated February 25, 1991, set forth specific guidelines for dealing with Bahá'ís so that "their progress and development are blocked."

During the past two years, there has been an increase in arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, the destruction of historic religious sites, defamation campaigns in government-sponsored media, and other pressures of a type not experienced since the years immediately following the Islamic Revolution. In 2005, the Iranian Government initiated a new wave of assaults, home raids, harassment and detentions. More than 120 Bahá'ís are awaiting trial after having been imprisoned, most of them without having been charged. However, one charge has been "creating anxiety in the minds of the public and those of the Iranian officials." In December 2005, 59-year-old Mr. Zabihollah Mahrami died of unknown causes after 10 years imprisonment on charges of apostasy. Bahá'ís have been barred from institutions of higher education since 1980. Despite assurances by the Iranian Government that Bahá'ís would be able to attend university in 2005, authorities have continued to exclude Bahá'ís from attending university due to their religion. From October 2005 to the present, the government-sponsored newspaper, *Kayhan*, has been running a campaign of vilification and distortion on the Bahá'í Faith to arouse public antipathy against the Bahá'ís. In 2004 and 2005, two important Bahá'í holy places were destroyed and a cemetery was desecrated.

One of the most ominous signs of the government's intentions was exposed on March 20, 2006. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief revealed the existence of a confidential letter from the Command Headquarters of Iran's Armed Forces to several Iranian government agencies. The letter stated that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had instructed the Command Headquarters to identify persons who adhere to the Bahá'í Faith and to monitor their activities. The letter went on to order the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard and the Police Force to collect, in a highly confidential manner, any and all information about members of the Bahá'í Faith. The White House subsequently expressed its concern for the "worsening" situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The Anti-Defamation League called the Iranian Government's actions "reminiscent of the steps taken against Jews in Europe and a dangerous step toward the institution of Nuremberg-type laws."

On May 19, 2006, 54 Bahá'ís were arrested in the city of Shiraz while they were engaged in humanitarian service with underprivileged children. Most of the Bahá'ís who were arrested were young people. It was one of the largest mass arrests of

Bahá'ís since the 1980s. On that same day, the houses of six of those arrested were raided. Notebooks, computers, books and documents were confiscated. The Bahá'ís who were arrested were later released, but all await trial.

PERSECUTION IN EGYPT

The most urgent issue that faces the Bahá'í community in Egypt is the Government's decision to require all of its citizens to obtain mandatory identification cards. At present, Bahá'ís are not legally permitted to obtain these cards.

The Bahá'í community in Egypt traces its roots to the 1860s. The first National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt, the Bahá'í national governing body, was elected in 1924, and legally incorporated in 1934.

In 1925, the Supreme Religious Court of Cairo annulled the marriage between a Bahá'í man and a Muslim woman on the grounds that the Bahá'í Faith was a "heresy." The court also acknowledged that the Bahá'í Faith was "a new religion, [and] entirely independent." This was the first official recognition of the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion in the Muslim world.

In 1960, President Nasser signed Presidential Decree 263 banning Bahá'í activities. The ban dissolved "all Bahá'í Assemblies and Centers." "Individuals, bodies and institutions" were forbidden from engaging "in any activity." All Bahá'í properties, including the national headquarters building, the libraries, and cemeteries, as well as all Bahá'í funds and assets were confiscated. These properties and assets have never been returned. The ban on Bahá'í organization and activities remains law today.

In keeping with the Bahá'í principle of obedience to government, the Bahá'ís of Egypt immediately disbanded their religious institutions in 1960. The Government promised that individuals would remain free to practice their religion, and Bahá'ís accordingly replaced community services with worship by individuals and families. Nevertheless, they have faced several episodes of arrests, detentions, and imprisonment, the most recent being in 2001. Bahá'ís remain under constant police surveillance. Their homes are periodically searched. Bahá'í literature is taken and destroyed.

Over the last several decades, the Egyptian Bahá'í community has diminished in size by 90 percent, to 500 people.

Along with Christianity and Judaism, the Bahá'í Faith has been regularly vilified and misrepresented in the Egyptian media. The attacks in the media appear designed to inspire popular hostility against the Bahá'ís. Recurring themes are that Bahá'ís are spies of foreign powers and that they indulge in immoral activities. These calumnies have no basis in fact, but for many Egyptians this is the only information about the Bahá'í Faith they have ever encountered.

The Bahá'í community of Egypt has also faced persecution and harassment from the religious orthodoxy in Egypt. Over the years, the Bahá'í Faith has been the subject of numerous "fatwas" that deride it as a heresy and accuse its followers of apostasy, a charge which is punishable by death under traditional Islamic law. Most recently, on December 15, 2003, a fatwa by the Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar University described the Bahá'í Faith as "a lethal spiritual epidemic in the fight against which the state must mobilize all its contingencies to annihilate it." The statement goes on to demand: "those [Bahá'ís] who have committed criminal acts against Islam and our country must disappear from life and not be allowed to announce their deviation from Islam."

The crisis that immediately confronts the Egyptian Bahá'ís concerns the identification cards that must be obtained by each Egyptian citizen by the end of 2006. The cards must be presented for any type of government service, such as medical care in a public hospital or processing for a property title or deed. They are required to obtain employment, education or banking services. They are needed to pass through police checkpoints, and individuals without cards are deprived of their freedom of movement.

These identification cards require citizens to state their religious affiliation. The current system allows for only one of the three recognized religions of Egypt to be entered: Islam, Christianity, or Judaism.

In the past, Bahá'ís had been permitted to leave the religious affiliation space blank, or to make a dash, or to write "other." A few were even permitted to list "Bahá'í." Now only one of the three recognized religions can be entered.

The Bahá'ís in Egypt have approached their government on numerous occasions to plead for a change in the identification card. Their requests for a change have been repeatedly denied.

We wish to emphasize that the Bahá'ís of Egypt are not asking for special treatment. They wish to follow the regulations of their government. Bahá'ís are willing

to continue to write a dash, or leave the religious affiliation space blank. It is evident that the challenges facing the Bahá'ís could be faced by any Egyptian citizen who also is not a Muslim, a Christian or a Jew.

What the Egyptian Bahá'ís are not able to do is to lie to their government by claiming to be members of a religion they are not—both because it is a matter of religious principle to them and because they do not wish to perpetrate a fraud against their government.

On April 4, 2006, an Egyptian Administrative Court found that Bahá'ís have the right to obtain government-issued documents that state their religion as Bahá'í. Notably, the court found that Bahá'ís have a right to accurate documents regardless of whether or not the government recognizes the legitimacy of their religion for “open practice.” The Ministry of the Interior has appealed that ruling. The Ministry of Justice has requested the Council of Islamic Studies at Al-Azhar to provide its opinion on the subject of the legitimacy of the Bahá'í religion. On May 15, the Supreme Administrative Court suspended implementation of the lower court ruling pending the Government’s appeal. On June 19, that same court postponed the appeal hearing until September 16, 2006.

MOVING FORWARD

In Egypt, the ultimate hope of the Bahá'í community is the rescinding or nullification of Presidential Decree 263—lifting the ban on their Faith. The Egyptian Government is signatory to several international human rights treaties, including the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees religious freedom. Our urgent plea is for the Egyptian Government to allow all of its citizens, including the Bahá'ís, to be treated as equal. The April 4 Administrative Court ruling provided a positive first step toward reaching that goal. We hope that the Supreme Administrative Court upholds on appeal the lower court’s ruling.

In 1996, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief recommended actions that the Iranian Government could take toward the eventual emancipation of the Bahá'í community. They were: allowing full access to education and employment; providing the right to citizenship, burials, freedom of movement, and security of the person; allowing Bahá'ís to reestablish their banned administrative institutions; and nondiscrimination against the Bahá'ís and the restoration of Bahá'í community properties. None of these steps has yet been implemented. Given the recent crackdown on the largest religious minority in that country, we appeal once again to the Iranian Government to stop arresting and harassing Bahá'ís, not to implement its plan to record the names and monitor the activities of all Bahá'ís, and to permit Bahá'ís to practice their religion in complete freedom.

Before we conclude, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the various agencies of the U.S. Government—the White House, the State Department, the Congress, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom—for speaking out in the U.S. and internationally at the U.N. about the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Egypt. We believe that a government’s repressive policies and actions must not be allowed to remain hidden. We thank Senators Reid and Brownback and Congressmen Kirk and Lantos, along with the many co-sponsors who are supporting the current Congressional resolutions calling for the emancipation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. We hope Congress will continue to voice its concern and will work with Parliamentarians worldwide for the religious freedom of all people. The Bahá'ís of the U.S. thank Congress for affirming the right of the long-suffering Bahá'ís in Iran and Egypt to practice freely their religion.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Ms. Bigelow. I was actually at the White House when President Reagan first began making the plight of the Baha'is, especially in Iran, a key issue for U.S. diplomacy. I applaud you on your steadfast support for religious freedom in general, but especially for the Baha'is for all of these years.

Just a few questions because all of your testimonies were very powerful and persuasive and gives this Subcommittee and Congress much to do in follow-up.

Basically I would like to ask all of you, what has been your response, Father Firas, with the U.S. Government? Have you been satisfied with the U.S. efforts?

I know the answer to some extent, especially Ms. Malek-Yonan, with regards to what seems to be a deaf ear to the Assyrians. But

when violence occurs, has the bishop been able to convey that destruction of churches? You mentioned 27 churches attacked or bombed between 2004 and 2006. What has been the response by the U.S. Government? Is there a response to the U.S. military command?

We certainly will raise and present copies of your testimony and ask for an official response.

And in regards to the voting, obviously voter fraud is something that we take very seriously as well. When ballot boxes disappear, that is very serious. The first time ever in Iraqi history, and yet again denial. If you can answer what the U.S. and Iraqi response has been to your well documented charges.

Father as well. All of you really. That is an open question.

Ms. MALEK-YONAN. We voice our concerns. Our bishops speak up, but nobody listened. If nobody listens, it falls on deaf ear, our hands are tied. Who should we go to and say look at what they have done to us? Look at what is happening in Iraq? Look at what is happening to this minority people?

We don't have a country. We don't have political standing. Unless other governments step in and speak on our behalf, then our hands are tied. We just sit quietly and remain victims.

As far as the issue of voting, of course we spoke up. We always do. But again, nothing was done about it. There are a lot of incidents where they photographed people voting, and the same person kept going back. They had special solutions to remove the purple ink off their fingers. We have the photographs. We have all of the evidence.

These cases that I have cited here, these are real cases. These are real people with real faces and names. We try to tell the media, but nobody listens. And if something does get reported, it just gets reported as "the Christians of Iraq" or "minority Christians." we have a name. We are Assyrians. We need to be called by our name, not just a generic Christian. We have a name and we want to be recognized as such.

Mr. SMITH. Is the bishop, is his life put at risk? Or pastors, priests?

Ms. MALEK-YONAN. Absolutely. They don't know what to do. They don't know who to turn to. Who can they talk to? Not even the U.S. military, nobody. Of course we know what is going on. Of course the U.S. military knows what is going on. If there are churches bombed, they are aware of it; but it doesn't go beyond that. It needs to move beyond that.

Mr. SMITH. I appreciate that.

Father FIRAS. After the visit of Father McCarrick, he came to us when he came to Aboud. I went to the highest level for us here in the United States, and he met President Bush and told him about Aboud. But we are waiting to see something. We want something, to feel it.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Ms. BIGELOW. Mr. Chairman, as you mentioned, the case of the Iranian Baha'is has been brought to the attention of the U.S. Government for many, many years. President Reagan himself took a very strong leadership role. And the role of the United Nations, and it is particularly with the United Nations because we do not

have bilateral relations with Iran so that makes it much more challenging. So the United States has been invaluable working with the EU, the Canadians and the Australians working on resolutions at the United Nations.

The Egyptian case is more recent and is now just becoming more public. And we are urging the U.S. Government, whether it would be the White House or the State Department or Congress, to speak out more strongly about the situation that the Baha'is in Egypt face.

Mr. SMITH. One final question, Ms. Malek-Yonan. The UN, has that been of any help to the Assyrian Christians?

Ms. MALEK-YONAN. No one has been of any real help that makes a difference in the lives of the Assyrians. Sometimes attempts are made, but we need real help. We are losing most of our people from Iraq. They are migrating, they are being forced out of the country. If there is help, it is too little.

Mr. SMITH. You mentioned that young 15-year-old boy, Fadi Shamoan. Was the perpetrator of that crime ever brought to justice?

Ms. MALEK-YONAN. No.

Mr. SMITH. That is a horrible story.

Thank you. Again, we will follow-up with each of our testimonies.

For example, in Iraq, we will ask our command what they are doing, how they investigate. And I know that the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom has done some very good reporting on the Assyrian Christians, and we thank them for that work, but reporting is not enough. We need action. You give us much to work on.

Mr. Payne.

Mr. PAYNE. I would like to thank each of you for your testimony. I think sometimes the wheel of justice and democracy grinds slowly. But the fact that your testimony is a matter of record, I think we will be able to focus more on the individual situations that each of you have spoken about.

As you indicated, the cradle of civilization is around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Assyrians are the first people that you read about. It certainly must be preserved. We will certainly work with the Chairman to see if there can be resolution.

The same with your issue, Ms. Bigelow.

Father, I know you have one of the greatest champions with Archbishop McCarrick. He has moved around the world and has done so much. He was the archbishop in Newark, New Jersey, my city, and I had the privilege of having many breakfasts with him right at our, about, a basilica in Newark, and it is unfortunate that he had to retire. I wanted to send a note to the Pope to push the retirement age up to 80, but I couldn't get through to the Pope.

We will certainly take all of your issues and do the best we can with them.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Ms. McCollum.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have two letters that I would like to submit for the record. One is from the Friends Committee on National Legislation and the other is from Churches for Middle East Peace. You might have already included them into the record, but if you haven't, please do so.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I would like to just thank the witnesses for their testimony.

I would like to ask, Father, you talked a little bit in your statement about the way in which the boundaries have affected the ability for interfaith worship, but I also know there are some challenges with some of the schools, with students being able to get to and from school and return to home. The Catholic schools are interfaith teaching schools, and the hospitals I know in my district a lot of them are sponsored by my mother's faith, which was Lutheran. They have experienced some difficulties and supplies and people being able to get back and forth. If you would comment on that.

Just to the other two witnesses, thank you so much more sharing. They did talk about the elections and the ballot boxes and individuals, and it was just one or two newspapers that mentioned it, but it was overwhelming success and it was taken care of and people were found and it didn't effect the outcome of the election. And it was so wonderful to hear you speak because quite often when I speak up it is often looked at as being partisan, and so I feel my voice has been marginalized. Thank you so much for your words.

We have much to do in our own country about the Baha'i and other faiths being fully integrated and recognized. We have work here to do as well.

Father, you traveled such a great distance, and if I can just call upon you.

Father FIRAS. In our school we have about 72 Muslims, and when we have catechism for both, we have catechism for Christians and Muslims in the same school. We have good relations with them because of all the Muslims in the village or the village around, they are coming to our school because we have the best education in the area.

Sometimes I have a problem with the kids when they want to travel because the entrance sometimes is closed by a military jeep. Sometimes I have to go up there to the entrance to bring them to the school with my car.

With the barrier, they will close a little bit the road, the street, from three villages around so they will not have the ability to come to our school.

About the hospitals, to go to the hospital in Jerusalem or Hadasah, sometimes we can't because we don't have permit.

I want to tell you the story of a mother of a priest in a village about 15 kilometers from Aboud. She died at a checkpoint of heart attack because of waiting. They don't care who is in the ambulance.

Sometimes we can't access from Aboud or in Aboud. I spend about 3 hours on my first day entering Aboud, 3 hours at the checkpoint without doing anything. You don't have a checkpoint to enter here. I am a Jordanian and I am a parish priest. I have to enter to my parish. No way. You can't enter. You don't have a permit to enter here. But I entered.

Sometimes I don't have the permit to go out from Aboud. Once I went to the supermarket and I turned back; just in 5 minutes. You don't have the right to enter here. It is our life in Aboud.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Would any of you like to add anything before we conclude the hearing?

If not, let me just make one final comment, and we will follow-up on your very powerful and passionate and fact filled testimonies. It gives us a real launching pad. The Committee has been aware, but this gives us fresh impetus to act, and I want to thank you for that.

I do want to make a point today that in 1989 on what was my then fifth trip to Romania focusing on particular religious freedom, I met a brilliant young Foreign Service officer about the same age as me—I was young then—Dennis Curry, who was the human rights officer in Romania, and we quickly became friends. Frank Wolf and I, another fellow laboring in the vineyard of human rights, particularly with regard to Romania, and I got to know this man, Dennis Curry. And he has worked in Brazil, Romania, Monrovia, Russia and his next posting will be to Saudi Arabia where I am sure he will encounter the religious freedom issue head on.

But he has been working on the Subcommittee now for the last year. He has done a tremendous job of researching and providing us with very usable information that has been put into legislation. He has been a drafter of bills, some of which have become law, others which will become law we hope very soon. The Subcommittee is going to miss him dearly. He has been brilliant in this position.

The State Department's loss for a year, our gain, will now be their gain once again. I want to wish Dennis Curry every success and reiterate how much he will be missed. We actively recruited him and State didn't want to let him go, but he is now going back. Dennis, thank you so much.

Without any further ado, the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:30 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

Churches for Middle East Peace



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Coordinator

June 26, 2006

Chairman Christopher H. Smith
Ranking Member Donald M. Payne
House International Relations Committee
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Relations
Washington, DC 20515

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service
Committee

Antiochian Orthodox Christian
Archdiocese of North America

Armenian Orthodox Church

Catholic Conference of Major
Superiors of Men's Institutes

Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Common Global Ministries Board

Church of the Brethren

Church World Service

Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church
in America

Franciscan Friars (OFM)
English Speaking Conference,
JPIC Council

Friends Committee on National
Legislation

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese
of America

Maryknoll Missioners

Mennonite Central Committee

National Council of Churches

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Reformed Church in America

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ
Common Global Ministries Board

United Methodist Church
General Board of Church and Society
General Board of Global Ministries
Women's Division

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Payne,

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) commends Congressman Christopher Smith and the entire Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Relations for holding a hearing on the important topic of religious pluralism and the plight of religious minorities in the Middle East. We write to you today as a coalition of 21 Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches and church-related organizations focused on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking and with partner churches throughout the Middle East, and particularly in the Holy Land. We are aware that there is increased interest in the situation of Palestinian Christians and would like to provide the subcommittee with some of our conclusions and respectfully ask that this letter and its attachments be included as part of the official record of the hearing.

Enclosed are frequently asked questions prepared by CMEP staff about the situation of Palestinian Christians. Also enclosed is an article by Fr. Drew Christiansen, S.J. on the same topic, titled "Living Stones in Ruins," which will be published in a forthcoming issue of the Italian Jesuit magazine *Il Populi*. Fr. Christiansen is editor-in-chief of *America*, a Jesuit weekly magazine, served for 14 years as advisor to the US Catholic Conference of Bishops on Middle East policy and is a member of CMEP's Leadership Council.

Thank you for your addressing this important issue and for your time in reviewing these materials on the situation of Palestinian Christians.

Sincerely,

Corinne Whitlatch
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Relations

FAQs on the Situation of Palestinian Christians

What do Palestinian Christians report about their situation? From visits to the Holy Land and in dialogue with church leaders and congregants, US churches have heard that the most pressing issues affecting the daily life of Christians, as well as Muslims, are related to the occupation and the conflict. The route of Israel's separation barrier, the presence and expansion of Israeli settlements and the difficulty in reaching jobs, schools, health care facilities and places of worship because of lack of freedom of movement are among the causes of greatest hardship.

Why is the number of Christians in the Holy Land dwindling at such a high rate? Factors for the dwindling Christian population are varied and complex with the two major reasons being economic deterioration and the difficult political conditions due to the occupation and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other factors include the low birth rate of Christians in comparison to Muslims and the relatively high socioeconomic status of many Christians which makes it easier for them to leave.

Are Christian institutions and NGOs able to operate safely in the Holy Land? Church institutions in the Holy Land, such as the Lutheran World Federation's Augusta Victoria Hospital and the Catholic Bethlehem University operate freely and openly as Christian-based organizations that provide services to all Palestinians, regardless of their religion. Church-related development organizations such as World Vision and Catholic Relief Services report that they employ both Christian and Muslim Palestinians and that their Christian employees are free to practice their faith.

What is the Palestinian Authority's track record on religious freedom and the rule of law and how are Christians treated? Now and previously the Palestinian Authority has not adequately enforced human rights standards and the rule of law, which has had adverse effects on all Palestinians. There have been a few cases of insufficient intervention of PA security forces on behalf of Christians; however, contrary to some reports, the PA has not been responsible for systematic persecution of Christians. The PA generally maintains good relations with the Christian community. In fact, the PA has set a Christian quota in the Palestinian Legislative Council, securing seats for Christian representatives from Gaza, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jerusalem districts. Christmas and Easter are freely celebrated and Christians hold many prominent positions in Palestinian society. Hanan Ashrawi was a long-time member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and an official Spokesperson of the Palestinian Delegation to the Middle East Peace Process in the 90s. The head of the PLO mission to the US (which also relates to the PA) is Afif Safieh, a Roman Catholic. Christians currently hold other important positions, such as advisor to the President, head of the Palestinian Monetary Authority and mayors of Ramallah and Bethlehem.

What is the state of Christian-Muslim relations in the Palestinian territories? As a minority group, Christians are particularly vulnerable to societal friction and the instability of life in the West Bank and Gaza. Real tensions do exist between Christian and Muslim Palestinian communities, with some unofficial harassment and discrimination taking place on the local level. Generally, violent incidents are not widespread and relations are congenial. Thuggery, mob violence and revenge attacks are problems in Palestinian society that need to be dealt with more effectively. When the victims are Christians, these problems are sometimes cast as religious persecution. Moreover, disputes between Christians and Muslims related to inter-marriage, conversion and other family and community issues have occasionally resulted in violence, but are more often related to social or inter-family conflicts. At times, Christian leaders, such as Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, have mediated these disputes and helped to restore good relations. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Palestinian society is a concern of Christians as it is for the majority of Palestinians whose preference is for a secular and pluralistic form of governance. This concern may increase now with the election of Hamas. Furthermore, the failure to achieve a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict contributes to support for fundamentalist Islam in the region.

What role do Palestinian Christians play in Palestinian society? Palestinian Christians, by their political preference and presence itself, constitute a necessary element for a secular, non-theocratic form of Palestinian governance. The Church often emphasizes the importance of nonviolence and reconciliation between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and the three Abrahamic faiths. The presence of Palestinian Christians and Christian institutions is an essential part of the rich history and common future of the land where Christianity began.

Formed in 1984, Churches for Middle East Peace is a Washington-based program of the Alliance of Baptists, American Friends Service Committee, Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Armenian Orthodox Church, Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men's Institutes, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Church of the Brethren, Church World Service, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Franciscan Friars OFM (English Speaking Conference, JPIC Council), Friends Committee on National Legislation, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Maryknoll Missioners, Mennonite Central Committee, National Council of Churches, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church (UBCS & GBGM).

(June 26, 2006: Churches for Middle East Peace has made this commentary available to the House International Relations Committee with Fr. Christiansen's permission.)

TO BE PUBLISHED IN *POPULI*, AN ITALIAN-LANGUAGE JOURNAL:

Living Stones in Ruins

by Drew Christiansen, S. J.

The People and the Churches

The Christians of the Holy Land are a colorful microcosm of the ancient churches of the Middle East. There are Greek and Syrian Orthodox, Melkite and Latin Catholics, Armenians, Maronites, Copts, Ethiopians and Chaldeans, and smaller groups of Anglicans, Lutherans and Evangelicals. There is even a gathering of Hebrew-speaking Catholics, the Community of Saint James, consisting mostly of French expatriate converts from Judaism.

It is hard to get precise figures on the numbers of Christians. In the four jurisdictions that make up the Holy Land, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Jerusalem, they number approximately 300,000. Slightly more than half are said to be Orthodox. The next largest group consists of Catholics, mostly Latins and Melkites. Since the first Palestinian *Intifada* (Uprising) in 1987, the patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem have issued periodic statements on public issues facing their people. The heads are thirteen altogether, the Greek, Latin and Armenian patriarchs and ten other church leaders, including the Anglican and Lutheran bishops, but not Evangelical leaders.

These ancient churches, especially the Orthodox and the (Latin) Catholics, are guardians of the Holy Places. In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre/Resurrection and the Church of the Nativity, the Orthodox share jurisdiction with the Franciscans and with other oriental churches under complicated arrangements set out in a 19th century Ottoman law known as *The Status Quo*. The churches jealously guard their prerogatives, and from time to time the joint jurisdiction sparks disputes. The Orthodox Holy Fire ceremony on Holy Saturday has been the occasion in recent years for clashes between Greeks and Syrians, and a Syrian chapel in the Holy Sepulchre destroyed by fire decades ago has yet to be restored for lack of Greek agreement.

The Challenges

Unresolved Conflict. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict pervades every other aspect of life in the Holy Land. The current phase of the struggle has put the churches under extreme pressure. Most of the Christian faithful regard themselves as Palestinians, and whether they live in Israel or Palestine, they are affected by the struggle. In Israel, for example, some 70 % of Christians are dependent on the pilgrimage trade for their livelihood. When the number of pilgrimages plummets because of fears over the conflict, unemployment and underemployment rise. In the Palestinian areas like Bethlehem, the economic impact is even worse due to border closings, checkpoints, and advice from Israeli tour companies to pilgrims against entering the territories.

The Al Aqsa *Intifada* (2000) seriously affected the Christians in Bethlehem and the neighboring towns of Beit Sahur and Beit Jala. The outlying districts became battlegrounds between roving Muslim militias and the Israeli Defense Force. Heavy Israeli incursions disrupted commerce and destroyed much of the infrastructure newly renovated for the Great Jubilee. Successive Israeli security measures, including the Security Barrier or Wall separating Israel from the West Bank, have resulted in the confiscation of Palestinian land, particularly in Christian neighborhoods.

In addition, in the chaos of the armed uprising, Christian town-dwellers suffered from the collapse of law and order. Gangs and militias were indistinguishable, and crime was rampant. As relatively well-to-do town dwellers, Christians were subject to extortion, kidnapping, robbery and murder. The same kind of lawlessness could be found in Muslim-on-Muslim crime in Jenin and Nablus, but because the victims in Bethlehem were Christians, the offenses there were often put down to religious persecution.

Islamic Fundamentalism. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is a second threat to Christians in the region. For the short run, it has strengthened the church in Jordan, prompting Christians to improve their knowledge of the faith and, with the encouragement of the royal government, to strengthen their institutions and ties to the world church.

In the Palestinian Territories, Islamic militancy has been a growing challenge. Contrary to some reports, the Palestinian Authority has not been responsible for persecution of Christians or the failure to protect them. The Authority has tried to protect Christians, but the influx of devout and militant Muslims from the countryside into the towns and cities has led to unofficial harassment and discrimination on the local level.

The situation has been aggravated since 2000 by the new stage of Palestinian resistance and recently by the election of the Islamist Hamas movement to control of the PA. Fears have grown that Christians will be compelled to adhere to Muslim customs, like the headscarf for women and the prohibition of alcohol. Hamas authorities, however, have assured leaders of the Christian churches that they will not discriminate against Christians.

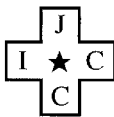
The situation is also complex in Israel. In a number of situations, the police have failed to provide Christians protection against Jewish, Muslim and Druze rioters. In the case of the disputed Shehab al-Din Mosque adjacent to the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, Israeli politicians, elected leaders and security officials colluded for years with the militant northern wing of the Islamic Movement before the project was stopped.

Status of the Churches. Finally, the legal status of the Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches in Israel has been put in question. After the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church deposed Irenaios I as patriarch for allegedly secretly selling property to Israeli interests, the government refused to acknowledge the deposition and the election of a new patriarch. As a result, the new patriarch, Theophilus III, is unable to take legal action on behalf of the church.

Meanwhile, after signing a treaty with the Vatican in 1993, the Israeli government has affirmed in court that the treaty, known as the "Fundamental Agreement," is not legally binding in Israel because no enabling legislation has ever been passed. This *de facto* renunciation of the treaty has already hampered negotiations between the church and the government, and it places in jeopardy the Vatican's plans of stabilizing the situation of Catholic rights and interests in the Jewish state.

Following the 1993 Oslo Accords, the Vatican had hoped that the future of Christianity in the Middle East could be constructed on the fundamental right to religious freedom of individual believers. As the overall situation of Christians has deteriorated, however, the faithful have come to depend, as in the past, on the official church for support. As legal uncertainty clouds the future of the institutional church, the prospects for Holy Land Christians seem clouded too.

Drew Christiansen, S. J. is editor in chief of *America*, a U. S. Jesuit weekly. For 14 years, he advised the U. S. bishops on Middle East policy.



**PATRIARCHS AND HEADS
OF LOCAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM**

**To the Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate of the
United States of America**

Patriarch Theophilos III
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

Patriarch Michel Sabbah
R.C. Latin Patriarchate

Patriarch Torkom II
Armenian Apostolic
Orthodox Patriarchate

Pier-Battista Pizzaballa
Custos of the Holy Land

Anba Abraham
Coptic Orthodox

Swerios Malki Mourad
Syrian Orthodox

Abune Grima
Ethiopian Orthodox

Paul Nabil Sayyah
Maronite Patriarchal
Exarchate

Riah Abu Al-Assal
Episcopal Church of
Jerusalem & the
Middle East

Mounib Younan
Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Jordan
& the Holy Land

Pierre Malki
Syrian Catholic
Patriarchal Exarchate

George Bakar
Greek Catholic
Patriarchal Exarchate

Raphael Minassian
Armenian Catholic
Patriarchal Exarchate

Greetings of Grace and Salaam from the Holy City of Jerusalem.

During the last several months, there has been renewed attention to the situation of Palestinian Christians. We as the leaders of the Palestinian Christian community welcome and appreciate the desire to support Palestinian Christians. At the same time, we believe that much that has been said does not represent the reality we face. Nor does it address the true causes of the suffering and hardships our community endures each day.

We would like therefore to take this opportunity to invite a delegation of the United States Congress to come to Jerusalem and visit the Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land. Coming and experiencing firsthand the hardships of a community living under an illegal military Occupation will allow you to assess the situation from the point of view of those who suffer. The visit would provide opportunities to meet with Church leaders, women, children, youth, lay leaders and ordinary Palestinian Christians from all walks of life and all denominations.

We welcome your interest and, even more, we would welcome the opportunity to meet and talk with you here in our home. There has been massive migration to other countries of Palestinian Christians largely due to the illegal Occupation. Our future as a vital religious community in our own land requires a solution to the conflict that will allow both peoples to live side by side in justice, peace and security.

Please come to Jerusalem and see for yourselves.

Jerusalem, June 28th 2006

On behalf of them

+ Michel SABBAH, *Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem*

+ Mounib YOUNAN, *Evangelical Lutheran Bishop*

+ Riah ABU AL-ASSAL, *Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East*

**PATRIARCHS AND HEADS
OF LOCAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM**

For the attention, please, of CONGRESSMEN McCaul & CROWLEY

Patriarch Theophilus III
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

Patriarch Michel Sabbah
R.C. Latin Patriarchate

Patriarch Torkom II
Armenian Apostolic
Orthodox Patriarchate

Pier-Battista Pizzaballa
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Episcopal Church of
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Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Jordan
& the Holy Land

Pierre Malki
Syrian Catholic
Patriarchal Exarchate

George Bakar
Greek Catholic
Patriarchal Exarchate

Fr. Raphael Minassian
Armenian Catholic
Patriarchal Exarchate

Your Excellencies,

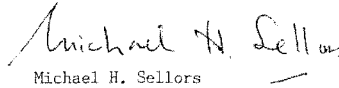
As Co-ordinator of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, I am asked to write to you in response to the Resolution which you are submitting to the House of Representatives of the USA - "Condemning the Persecution of Palestinian Christians."

Please, your Resolution is based on many false affirmations. Moreover, the issues between Moslems and Christians are the concern of the local Christians and their Spiritual Leaders who are able to resolve them for themselves. They are not seeking your interference in their internal problems.

Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority is not allowed to exert its full authority to impose public internal order due to the continuing Occupation and its consequences. Therefore, abuses, within this lack of authority are many, between Moslems and Moslems, as well as between Moslems and Christians.

Your support for the Christian Presence in the Holy Land will best be served by helping to remove the Separation Wall (which has converted all the Palestinian towns into big prisons for Christians and Moslems alike) and by helping to bring Occupation to an end with all its inherent types of oppression and humiliation.

Yours sincerely,


Michael H. Sellors

Jerusalem 19th June 2006