

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

September 11, 2017

Dear Mr. Vice President:

Thank you for your leadership on the issue of Christians, Yizidis and other religious minority communities targeted for genocide by ISIS. We took heart from your clear assertions last spring that religious freedom is an American foreign policy priority and that the administration would stand up for these severely persecuted religious groups. As coalition forces liberate Middle Eastern territory from ISIS, we are compelled to beseech you to take two urgently-needed steps to preserve these minority communities in Iraq from likely imminent extinction.

Unfortunately, U.S. government assistance has not been forthcoming to Iraq's Christian and Yizidi communities. To the virtual exclusion of these minority communities, United States' aid – amounting to \$1.4 billion in Iraq alone since 2014 – has been directed to support the food, medical and housing programs of the larger religious groups. Following ISIS' takeover of their towns and property, the displaced Christians, for example, have had to seek the mainstay of their aid from private charitable sources on a piecemeal, insecure basis, for over three years. They have not been able to avail themselves of the aid -- made possible with significant U.S. support -- provided by the United Nations because they are vulnerable to being targeted within the UN camps. Aid groups on the ground report that these Christians avoid seeking shelter in the region's UN camps for fear of being forcibly converted to Islam, raped, trafficked, murdered or kidnapped for ransom.

The U.S. policies and practices that have marginalized these Christian and Yizidi communities have yet to change.

This problem persists despite both your and President Trump's promises of aid to these communities and a Congressional mandate in the Consolidated Appropriations Act (FY 2017), which directs that portions of \$1.5 billion appropriated under it "shall be made available for humanitarian assistance for vulnerable and persecuted religious minorities, including victims of genocide designated by the Secretary of State."

Security also remains a principal concern for the small minority groups. Even as ISIS is defeated in Nineveh, new threats emerge. Both Christians and Yizidis report that Iranian-backed groups are establishing a presence in their areas of Nineveh Province. There is also the concern that Iran is using this area as a land bridge from Iran through Iraq to Syria, to ports on the Mediterranean and as a route for transporting weapons and forces to Syria and Lebanon. This is a direct threat to American national interests and to Israel's.

The dire impact is already evident. Far lower percentages of Christians and Yizidis have returned to their home towns in Nineveh Province, compared with the other larger displaced religious

communities in Mosul, Fallujah and Tikrit. Nineveh Christians largely remain displaced under church care in Erbil, while the Yizidis largely remain in their sprawling camps around Dohuk. With hope rapidly diminishing, Iraq's Christians, for example, continue to emigrate en masse from the region and risk seeing their 2,000-year-old presence in Iraq extinguished, altogether. Their numbers have plummeted from 1.4 million before 2003 to a mere 250,000 Christians today. At the same time, Iran encroaches on the now largely unpopulated Nineveh towns and villages where the displaced minorities formerly lived. Returning these minorities to their home towns is imperative to upholding both American humanitarian and national security interests.

We, therefore, urge you to facilitate two essential steps.

First: that a Presidential Decision Directive be issued directing the State Department and USAID to immediately address the needs of communities identified last month by Secretary Tillerson as having been targeted for genocide. This would address both humanitarian aid for those living as IDPs and refugees and stabilization assistance for those returning to the areas seized from them by ISIS.

Second: that a post be established by the White House for an inter-agency coordinator to guarantee that the needs of these communities are adequately addressed to ensure their preservation, consistent with our foreign policy. For such a role, we recommend Andrew Walther, who as Vice President at the Knights of Columbus has played an important role over the past several years in that organization's extensive humanitarian and advocacy work on behalf of these minorities. He has travelled in the region and played a pivotal role in raising \$15 million in private aid for these refugees and in the successful genocide designation campaign, last year. He would be able to coordinate with NGOs such as Samaritan's Purse, World Vision, Aid to the Church in Need and others.

We believe that these would be decisive steps in helping stabilize these communities and would prevent ISIS from achieving its stated goal of eradicating them from the region. Indeed, in Iraq, this may be the last chance to preserve the Christian community in the cradle of Christianity.

As always, we deeply appreciate your open and ongoing concern about this important issue and stand ready to assist in this matter in whatever ways we can.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf  
Member of Congress (ret. 1981-2014)  
Distinguished Senior Fellow, 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative

Nina Shea  
Director, Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom

Montserrat Alvarado  
Executive Director, Becket

Helen Alvaré  
Professor, Antonin Scalia School of Law  
George Mason University

Carl Anderson  
CEO, Knights of Columbus

Gary Bauer  
President, American Values

Alejandro Bermudez  
Executive Director, Catholic News Agency

J. Kenneth Blackwell  
Former U.S. Ambassador, U.N. Human Rights Commission

Brian Burch  
President, Catholic Vote

Cardinal Timothy Dolan  
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York

Thomas Farr  
President, Religious Freedom Institute  
Director, Religious Freedom Research Project, Georgetown University

Michael Farris  
President, CEO & General Counsel  
Alliance Defending Freedom

Peter Feaver  
Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, Duke University

John Garvey  
President, The Catholic University of America

Samuel Gregg  
Research Director, Acton institute

Kent R. Hill  
Former Assistant Administrator, USAID

William Inboden  
University of Texas-Austin

Kathryn Jean Lopez  
Senior Fellow, National Review Institute

Archbishop William Lori  
Archdiocese of Baltimore

Paul Marshall  
Jerry and Susie Wilson Professor of Religious Freedom  
Baylor University

Rev. Johnnie Moore  
Co-Chair, White House Evangelical Advisory Board

Russell Moore  
President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Southern Baptist Convention

Tony Perkins  
President, Family Research Council

Bishop Bawai Soro  
Chaldean Catholic Diocese of the Western United States

William Thorn  
Institute for Catholic Media, Diederich College of Communications  
Marquette University

Mark Tooley  
President, Institute on Religion and Democracy

Patriarch Ignatius Joseph III Younan  
Patriarch of Antioch of the Syriac Catholic Church