

March 4, 2010

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



Stop the Killing of Christians in Iraq

Dear President Obama,

Hundreds of Christians courageously took to the streets of Baghdad, Mosul and other Iraqi towns last Sunday to protest the continuing targeted murder and displacement of Christians and other non-Muslim minorities.

Among the protesters in Baghdad was Bishop Shlemon Warduni- Deputy to the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch, the Hon. Pascale Warda - former Government Minister, Abdullah Nofally- head of the Iraqi Dept. of Christian Endowment, and William Warda - President of the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization.

These unprecedented demonstrations took place in response to the killing of eight Christians in Mosul since mid-February and the consequent flight of over 4,300 from the city.

This recent wave of violence in Mosul comes in the context of a much broader catastrophe. Since the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime and the commencement of U.S.-led Operation Freedom Iraq, nearly half of the country's Christian population has been forced by targeted violence to seek refuge abroad, while a large element of those remaining in Iraq are internally displaced. According to the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization, over 700 Christians, including bishops and priests, have been killed and 61 churches have been bombed.

Having undertaken six fact-finding and humanitarian aid visits to Iraq since 2007, I can confirm that Christians and other persecuted non-Muslim minority communities now face the grim prospect of extinction – or “ethnic and religious cleansing”, to use the words of Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk. This tragedy unfolds at a time when the United States wields enormous military and political might on the ground in Iraq.

The Christian demonstrators last Sunday condemned the failure of the Iraqi Government to provide security for minority communities, especially in Mosul. They also urged the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations to intervene if the Iraqi authorities fail to fulfill this most basic function of government.

Speaking in Rome on Sunday, Pope Benedict XVI also urged the Iraqi authorities “to make every effort to restore security to the population, in particular to the most vulnerable religious minorities”. He furthermore urged “the international community to strive to give the Iraqis a future of reconciliation and justice.”

We have not yet heard from the White House a response to the plea of either the Pope or the Iraqi Christian demonstrators.

During the 2008 Presidential campaign you raised the hopes of the persecuted Iraqi minorities when you declared in a letter to then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice:

“Catholic Chaldeans, Syriac Orthodox, Assyrian, Armenian and Protestant Christians, as well as smaller, Yezidi and Sabeian Mandaean communities have paid a heavy price as a result of conflict in Iraq and continue to face a high level of threat and abuse. Moreover, Christian

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and other non-Muslim minorities continue to constitute a disproportionately high percentage of the Iraqi refugee population. In addition to these troubling trends, Christians and other non-Muslim religious minorities continue to face considerable difficulty in ensuring that they are adequately represented in Iraqi governmental institutions.” (Sen. Obama to Secretary Rice, September 26, 2008.)

Your letter to Secretary Rice concluded with the following pertinent questions:

“1) What progress has been made over the past year in reducing the severe violations faced by these communities of religious freedom and other human rights?

“2) What specific steps has the State Department taken to urge the Iraqi government to provide protection to Iraq’s Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities? Has the Iraqi government been responsive to requests for such protection? What is the U.S government’s assessment of the Iraqi government efforts to protect religious minority communities?

“3) What progress has the U.S. made over the last year in helping to secure asylum for those Iraqis who have a well-founded fear of persecution?

“4) What steps is the U.S. taking to ensure that Iraq’s Christians and other non-Muslim minorities are properly represented in Iraq’s government institutions?”

I urge you, Mr. President, to ask Secretary State Clinton to provide the public with answers to the questions you addressed to her predecessor. I furthermore entreat you to indicate support for House Resolution 944 on Protection of Members of Vulnerable Religious and Ethnic Minorities in Iraq, (sponsored by Gary Peters D-MI), especially § 2, calling on the Secretary of State to “develop and report to Congress on a comprehensive strategy to encourage the protection of the rights of members of vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq.”

I conclude, Mr. President, by encouraging you to make sure the United States places at least as much priority on providing security for Iraq’s powerless, vulnerable minorities as on the country’s well protected oil industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Eibner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. John Eibner
CEO