

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

February 7, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Persecution and violence against religious minorities in the Middle East is an ongoing crisis requiring close attention and robust engagement on the part of the U.S. Government. Centuries-old religious communities in the region continue to face violence, eradication, and displacement. Last year the House of Representatives and the Senate passed resolutions declaring the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria constituted war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The U.S. Department of State's March 2016 designation of genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims in Iraq and Syria underscored the gravity of the situation and the need for a stronger U.S. response.

On August 8, 2014, following unanimous passage in both the House and Senate, President Obama signed the *Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act* into law, a bill to establish a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. Unfortunately, rather than appointing a separate ambassador to the Special Envoy role as Congress intended, the previous administration designated the existing Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom as the Special Envoy.

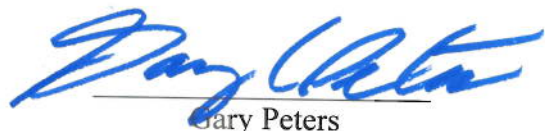
As congressional sponsors and supporters of the Special Envoy legislation, we urge your appointment of a distinct Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. Consistent with Public Law 113-161, the Special Envoy should hold the rank of ambassador and work in strong partnership with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. If filled quickly and provided the needed visibility, resources, and access to the Secretary of State, the Special Envoy role has the potential to achieve a lasting and positive impact on suffering religious communities in the region.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to continued partnership on this critical issue.

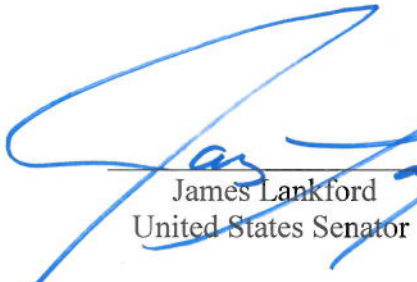
Sincere regards,



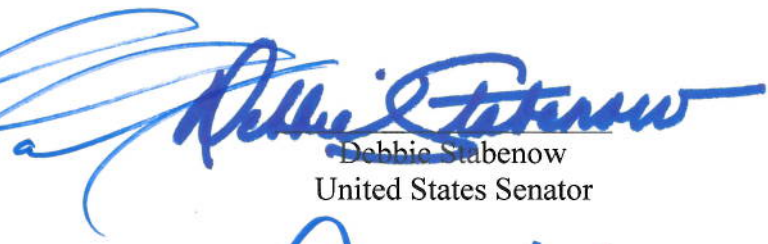
Roy Blunt
United States Senator



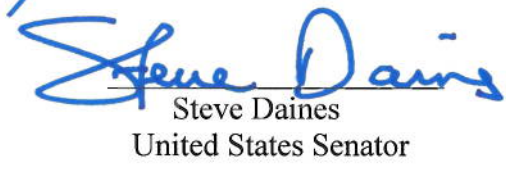
Gary Peters
United States Senator



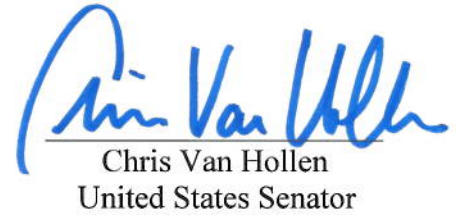
James Lankford
United States Senator



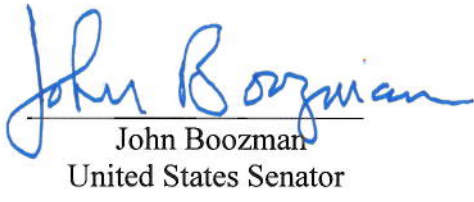
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator




Steve Daines
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator



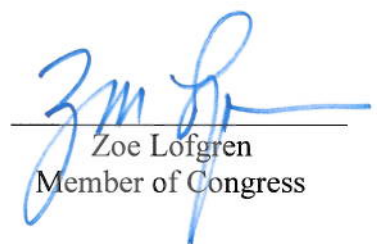
Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress



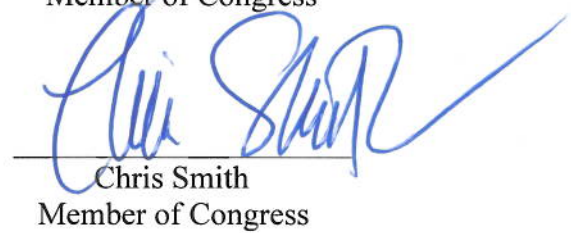
Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



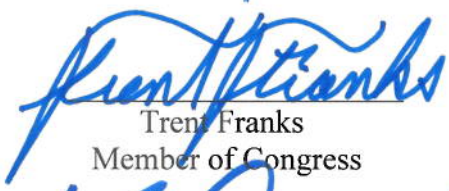
Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



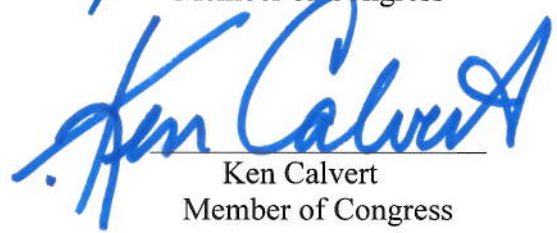
Chris Smith
Member of Congress



Trent Franks
Member of Congress



Bill Johnson
Member of Congress



Ken Calvert
Member of Congress




Robert Pittenger
Member of Congress





Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress




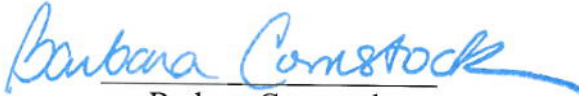
Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress


Juan Vargas
Member of Congress


Tim Walberg
Member of Congress


Peter J. Roskam
Member of Congress


Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress


Barbara Comstock
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State