

# CHRISTIAN MINORITIES UNDER ATTACK IN IRAQ AND EGYPT

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HEARING  
BEFORE THE  
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH CONGRESS  
FIRST SESSION

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JANUARY 20, 2011

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## HEARING ON CHRISTIAN MINORITIES UNDER ATTACK IN IRAQ AND EGYPT

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**THURSDAY JANUARY 20, 2011**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,

*Washington, D.C.*

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 2359 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Frank Wolf [co-chairman of the commission] presiding.

Mr. WOLF. We can begin, in light of the -- I want to thank all the witnesses for being here, and I want to thank Mr. Smith for his efforts on all these issues. I just want to publically acknowledge that I think there's nobody in Congress who does more and uses his position to help people who need help. So I just wanted to let Chris know, and I appreciate him being here.

On October 31, extremists laid siege on Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church in Baghdad, killing almost 70 worshippers and police. Sadly, the administration's initial response to this tragedy failed to even mention the word "Christian" or "Church", suggesting that this attack was simply part of a broader pattern of generalized violence in Iraq, and not targeted against an indigenous faith community, when obviously people of faith, Christians, were targeted, and there were two priests that were killed in the attack.

An op-ed in the Lebanese-based newspaper, the Daily Star, noted that, quote, "Sacrificing Iraq's Christian minority only reinforces intolerance, and reducing Christians also renders uniform one of the oldest multi-religious civilizations in the world. So far," the newspaper went on to say, "the issue has been met with astounding silence."

For several years, Congress has pressed the Obama administration, and the Bush administration before that, to develop a comprehensive policy to address the needs of ancient faith communities in Iraq, a policy which clearly recognizes what the White House's first statement failed to: that Christians are being targeted in Iraq.

Sadly, Iraq is not an anomaly. On New Year's Eve, Mariam Fekri, a 22 year old Coptic woman, posted on her Facebook page before leaving mass, quote, "2010 is over. This year has been the best memories of my life. I really enjoyed this year. I hope that 2011 is much better. Please, God, stay beside me, and help make it all true." End of quote.

That evening, a suicide bomber killed Mariam and at least 21 other worshippers as they were leaving services at a Coptic Christian church in Alexandria. The attack was the worst incident of violence against Egypt's Coptic minority in a decade.

The targeting of Christians in the Middle East has driven many to flee the lands they have inhabited for centuries and attempt to emigrate to the west. According to the National Geographic magazine, once a majority of the Arab world, Christians now make up only eight percent of the population in the region.

This is tragic, given the historical importance of both Iraq and Egypt in the Bible. With the exception of Israel, the Bible contains more reference to the cities, regions, and individuals, and the nations of ancient Iraq than to any other country.

The patriarch Abraham was from Ur. On my first trip to Iraq, we went to Ur. We went to the site that they told us was where Abraham's house was. Isaac's wife Rebecca was from Iraq. Jacob had sons who lived in Iraq for twenty-some years. Esther, for such a time like this, from the book of Esther, was from Iraq. Daniel, from Iraq. Jonah, from Nineveh, which is now in the Muslim area, from Iraq.

So today many of the Christians of Iraq still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus. In fact, at the mass, they were probably speaking in the very language that Jesus spoke in.

Egypt, too, has played an important role in the history of Jesus. Joseph and Mary fled with the baby Jesus to Egypt to escape the murderous King Herod, who was plotting to kill the child. The apostle Mark brought Christianity to Egypt at roughly 48 A.D., and was martyred in roughly 68 A.D.

The targeting and persecution of the Christian population in Iraq and Egypt is not only tragic, due to the historical importance of the region in a biblical context, but the dwindling Christian population has serious implications for the prospects of pluralism and tolerance in the Arab world.

In the Constitution Day speech, President Ronald Reagan said that the U.S. Constitution is a covenant, quote, "we have made not only with ourselves, but with all of mankind." The words that Ronald Reagan said then were true, and they ring true today.

I believe that we have an obligation to speak out for those who are voiceless, who are going through a very difficult time, whether they be Christian, whether they be Jewish, or whether they be Muslim, whether they be Baha'i, whether they be Buddhist.

But I think we have a moral obligation to speak out. The Christians of Iraq and Egypt need our voices here today, and again I want to thank everyone that is here for this important and timely hearing.

And I just spoke to Mr. Smith, and Congressman Trent Franks, too, and we're thinking of maybe doing a letter to the Administration asking that there be a special envoy appointed in the administration to be an advocate, to be a place -- we have special envoys for a lot of things, so I would appreciate the witnesses addressing this issue: would it be helpful to have a special envoy, whereby there is a location and a place that can be an advocate for, if you will, for the issue with regard to the middle east.

With regard to that, let me just turn to Mr. Smith, who I just wanted to say how much I appreciate all that he's done, and then Mr. Franks in the same way. Mr. Smith?

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Frank Wolf, thank you. And thank you for your extraordinary statement, but more importantly, and I think people in the audience and our witnesses know this, Congressman Frank Wolf is the prime sponsor of the International Religious Freedom Act, enacted in 1998 against huge opposition from the Clinton Administration, which I know because I chaired the Human Rights Subcommittee at the time.

They were diametrically opposed to it. He was tenacious in ensuring that that legislation was enacted into law, and that has been an extraordinary tool in promoting religious freedom, and to try to mitigate persecution around the world. So I want to again thank Mr. Wolf for that great idea, and for his legislation, the International Religious Freedom Act, of which he is the prime sponsor.

I also want to thank him for the excellent idea for a special envoy. You know, it was Mr. Wolf who led the effort to get the special envoy for Darfur, and to ensure that there was a focus like a laser beam on the myriad of issues surrounding Darfur.

Well, certainly the ongoing and escalating persecution of Christians, particularly in Iraq and places like Egypt, beg the question "Why don't we have one?" So I thank him for that idea today, as well.

As you know, we are facing a huge, escalating, ever-worsening human rights crisis in Iraq and Egypt. Citizens of these countries, who have been peacefully practicing their faith for millennia, are being brutally murdered by religious extremists, and their governments are not doing nearly enough to protect them and bring their murderers to justice.

In recent months in Iraq, we have seen what can only be explained as religious -- or pseudo-religious, because truly religious people never murder, or practice ethnic cleansing. On October 31st, 2010, as we all know, gunmen stormed Our Lady of Salvation Church in a historic neighborhood in Baghdad, Iraq, and took hostage more than 100 Catholic men, women and children worshipping inside.

Over the course of the hostage crisis and rescue operation, 52 police officers and worshippers, including two priests, were killed, and 75 people were wounded.

On November 9th, 2010, and November 10th, more than a dozen homes inhabited by Christians in Baghdad were targeted in coordinated bomb and mortar attacks, killing at least four people and wounding dozens more, including at least one family of a victim of the Our Lady of Salvation attack, whom terrorists may have identified by funeral signs hanging outside of the home.

The Iraq Human Rights Minister, Wijdan Michael, reportedly said at the scene of the attack, and I quote him: "What happened was more than a catastrophic and tragic even. In my opinion, it is an attempt to force Iraqi Christians to leave Iraq, and to empty Iraq of Christians," close quote.

This is not a new tactic by religious extremists, but one that they have now turned on Christians, after in another action of profound evil, driving almost every Jewish Iraqi citizen out of Iraq.

Christians have been fleeing their now dangerous home cities for the safer, northern part of the city, Mosul and Nineveh, which lacks the resources and jobs to fill the needs of the influx, but is in many cases doing its best to accommodate their fellow citizens.

Sadly, in the north, however, is a relative word. Safety, I should say, in the north, is a relative word. In May of last year, a bus filled with Christian students and university workers on their way from the University of Mosul were targeted in a bomb attack, injuring 80 people and killing a storekeeper who realized what was about to happen and attempted to keep the buses away from the bombs.

The United States Commission on International and Religious Freedom, also created by Mr. Wolf's landmark legislation back in 1998, noted in its 2010 annual report that, quote, "Despite the overall drop in violence in the country, violence against religious minorities and their religious sites continued in '09 and 2010, particularly in the northern disputed regions. Half of the once-vibrant Christian community of 1.5 million has left Iraq altogether."

Which minority is next? The Yazidi population has already dropped significantly, and over 90 percent of the Mandaean have already fled. Sunni Muslims, who make up over 30 percent of the population, have also suffered.

When the minority religious populations are gone, the extremists will target the Muslims who believe in human rights and are willing to offer protection to their Christian brothers, as 20 sheiks did after the latest massacres, stating the need to, quote, "strengthen the spirit of brotherhood, because we are all children of Adam and Abraham." What a remarkable statement encouraged on those sheiks' parts.

Pope Benedict has declared earlier this month that Christians are, worldwide, the religious group which suffers most from religious persecution. The holy father said that, and I quote, "This situation is unacceptable, since it represents an insult to God and to human dignity. Furthermore, it is a threat to security and peace, and an obstacle to the achievement of authentic and integral human development."

The same tragedy of religious cleansing that fanatics and a complacent government are responsible for bringing on in Iraq is taking place in Egypt as well. Coptic Christians in Egypt find their government unwilling to protect their fundamental rights to live, and to work together in the same community with Muslim Egyptians. The Egyptian government does not do nearly enough to protect them from eruptions of violence.

Mr. Wolf, and Mr. Trent Franks and I, and others for years have raised these issues with Mubarak, President Mubarak. And we always get "Well, we're working on it." Well, that's not enough.

I call on the government of Iraq to ensure that the 12 suspects arrested for Our Lady of Salvation massacre are brought to trial in a timely manner, a real trial that aims to discover according to law whether the accuses are guilty, and if so to punish them according to the law.

Unfortunately, the Egyptian government has repeatedly attempted to address murder through community mediation exercises. Mediation is not accountability. It trivializes the human rights travesty and blood spilled by the Coptic minority in Egypt. It does little to stop the violent tactics of those who scrawl the corridors of Coptic communities with the threat "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people." And so I call also on the Egyptian government to investigate crimes against Coptic Christians, and to do so according to the law.

I also commend the Muslim citizens of Egypt, who in response to the New Year's bomb attack which killed 21 Coptic Egyptian citizens and wounded scores of others, who offered solidarity and protested with the Copts in the street, calling for justice and protection for their fellow citizens. Will the Egyptian government now hear the cries of its people, Muslim and Christian? With the increase in violence over the last several years, Egypt ignores crimes committed against its Coptic citizens to its own peril.

But we have reason to hope. The primary murderer behind last year's Nag Hammadi Christian mass shooting, which killed six Christians and one Muslim security guard, has been convicted. We still await the sentencing of two other armed men in the attack, and the proper prosecution of other perpetrators of violence against the Coptic minority.

Christians in Egypt and Iraq have been blessed with magnificent religious leaders. Coptic Pope Shenouda has called for calm in Egypt, and has reminded Coptic Christians that Jesus, quote, "asks his followers to deal gently with others, regardless of their ethnicity or faith," and to, quote, "love all human beings, and to live a sin-free life which does not foster hatred against others."

Pope Benedict condemned the attacks, and said that they showed, quote, "the urgent need for government of the regions -- governments of the regions to adopt effective measures for the protection of religious minorities." Mr. Wolf, Chairman Wolf, thank you again for this important and very timely hearing, and I yield back.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you, Mr. Smith. Congressman Franks?

Mr. FRANKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I also extend my gratitude to the witnesses who are here, and to all of you who join us this morning for this important hearing. And I especially thank Mr. Wolf for chairing this hearing. And you know, Mr. Wolf and Mr. Smith have been the champions for human rights and for religious freedom in this place for certainly as long as I have been here, and I have the most profound respect for both of them.

Like all of you, like most Americans, of course, we were all deeply grieved by the recent attacks against Christians in both Iraq and Egypt. These recent attacks were some of the worst that we've seen in these countries, which is why it's so important that we're all here today to discuss what can be done to stop the senseless persecution of Christians in the middle east.

The October 31st attack on Baghdad's Syrian Catholic Church resulted in the deaths of nearly 60 worshippers and police officers, and sadly it is -- unfortunately, it appears to be only the beginning of what has become an all-out war on Christians by certain terrorists and terrorist groups in the region.

When the terrorist group, the Islamic State of Iraq, attacked the Syrian Church they claimed that it was in retribution for a grievance that they had against Christians being in Egypt. As if this attack, one of the worst in Iraq's recent history, weren't bad enough, Iraqi and Egyptian Christians were plagued by violence and brutal attacks throughout their recent holiday season.

A cluster of ten bomb attacks rattled Christian homes in Baghdad over Christmas and New Year's, resulting in the deaths of two Christians, and wounding at least a half a dozen others. Christian worshippers in Alexandria, Egypt, who were leaving New Year's Mass, were greeted by a powerful car bomb that killed at least 21, and injured at least 100 more. Christians in Baghdad didn't even get a chance to celebrate their most holy religious holiday, the birth of Christ.

Ironically, it was Jesus Christ himself who gave us the truest example of all religious freedom when he said "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He didn't say "I come to force myself on others: get out of the way or I'll break the door down." Instead, he personified the example of what true religious freedom is all about.

When Iraq drafted its constitution, some of my colleagues -- I believe including those here today -- and I worked to attach language to a supplemental appropriations bill requiring religious freedom to be included in the new Iraqi constitution. Unfortunately, that language was watered down, and not truly implemented as it should have been.

We all knew that if Iraq truly had a hope of a future, that one of the most important elements of that would be religious freedom embedded in its constitution, that transcended some of the other challenges that Iraq had. We can only imagine how the situation in Iraq would be different if those cherished words of freedom of religion were truly included and considered in the Iraqi constitution.

When the church in Baghdad was attacked, President Obama issued a statement that didn't even recognize that it was a church, or that Christians were targeted in the attack. Someone should remind President Obama of that old quote from the Iroquois Indian tribe that wisely said "The secret to the universe is in the true naming of things." When we fail to call religious persecution and terrorism for what they are, we only delay that shining moment when they will be mentioned only in history.

I wonder how this administration can have a policy in Iraq that completely disregards the specific targeting of vulnerable Christians by terrorists, if they truly seek to stabilize the country. How can the U.S. government continue to fund a, quote, "democracy," and military support in



Egypt in Iraq, when this administration doesn't even understand that religious freedom is the only true bulwark against the religious intolerance and extremism that threatens security and true democracy in these countries?

The status quo in Egypt is fundamentally unacceptable. Egypt has long been hailed as a democratic ally of the United States in the Middle East, and as such has received nearly 2 billion dollars in foreign aid annually. But if no significant change takes place, I, for one, will call for the United States to reduce aid to Egypt. I don't see how we can justify taxpayer dollars that go to a regime that empowers rogue -- or allows rogue extremists to engage in these senseless acts of violence.

Security must be enhanced, not only at places of worship in Iraq, but also near Christian homes when they travel to and from work. There needs to be more training of Iraq police and security force members to protect indigenous Christian groups and other minorities. And I truly mean that to apply to every last one of the religious groups in Iraq. Today there is focus, because of the recent attacks, on the Christian minorities there. We must also find a way to allow Christians and other religious minorities to leave the country, if they want to leave in safety and freedom.

And finally, we desperately need to target these Islamic militants -- Islamist militants, who are so ruthlessly exterminating minority groups in Iraq, by working with the local Christian and other religious minority communities to identify and prevent these security threats.

And so I just would say, may God help us all to be instruments of his deliverance to all of those oppressed in this world. And I thank all of you for being here, and I certainly look forward to your testimony. And I thank, again, the chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Franks follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE TRENT FRANKS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA AND MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Welcome to our witnesses and to everyone who joins us this morning. Mr. Wolf, thank you for chairing this important hearing.

Like most Americans, I was shocked and deeply grieved by the recent attacks against Christians in both Iraq and Egypt. These recent attacks were some of the worst we've seen in these countries which is why it is so important we are here to discuss what more can be done to stop the senseless persecution of Christians in the Middle East. I look forward to hearing our expert witnesses address these critical issues.

The October 31<sup>st</sup> attack on Baghdad's Syrian Catholic Church resulted in the deaths of nearly 60 worshipers and police officers and sadly, it was only the beginning in what has become an all-out war on Christians by certain terrorists in the region. When the terrorist group, the Islamic State of Iraq, attacked the Syrian Church, they claimed that it was in retribution for a grievance they had against Christians in Egypt. As if this attack, one of the worst in Iraq's recent history, weren't bad enough, Iraqi and Egyptian Christians were plagued by violence and brutal attacks throughout the recent holiday season. A cluster of 10 bomb attacks rattled Christian homes in Baghdad over Christmas and New Year's, resulting in the deaths of two Christians and wounding at least a dozen others. Christian worshipers in Alexandria, Egypt, who were leaving New Year's mass, were greeted by a powerful car bomb that killed at least 21 and injured another 100.

In Iraq, the attacks over Christmas and New Year's came on the heels of a mid-December announcement by one of al-Qaeda's front groups, the Islamic State of Iraq, that all Christians in Iraq have been deemed "legitimate targets." In fact, Iraq's military spokesman, Major General al-Moussawi, said that, "The aim of these attacks is to prevent Christians from celebrating the new year's holiday."

Christians in Baghdad didn't even get a chance to celebrate their most holy religious holiday -- the birth of Christ, the one who said: Behold I stand at the door and knock. He did not come to force Himself on others; instead, He gave us the true example of religious freedom.

I was particularly struck by how some of the bloody attacks against Christians were so callously brutal in their simplicity. Bombs were placed near the homes of at least 14 Christian families in Baghdad several weeks ago

and, during one such attack, Islamist militants left a bomb on the doorstep of the home of an elderly Christian couple and rang the doorbell. When the elderly couple answered the door, the bomb exploded, tragically ending both of their precious lives.

When Iraq drafted its Constitution, some of my colleagues and I worked to attach language to a supplemental appropriations bill requiring religious freedom to be included in the new Constitution. Unfortunately, the language was severely watered down. We can only imagine how the situation in Iraq would have differed if those cherished words of freedom of religion had been included in the Iraq Constitution.

The recent attacks in Egypt and the subsequent demonstrations by Egyptian Muslims in defense of their Christian neighbors is a powerful reminder that the terrorists do not speak for everyone in the Middle East. Moreover, we should not let their fear tactics impede our resolve to challenge them. As you know, Abdel Kareem Soleiman Amer was recently released after being imprisoned in Egypt for the past four years. He was imprisoned because he, like these more recent "human shields", stood in defense of the Coptic Egyptian community that had been attacked. While Kareem has been released, we cannot forget what he suffered to stand up for other human beings not of his own faith.

I was very involved in his case from the beginning and made sure that he was not forgotten. We cannot let the Egyptian government get away with the injustice they are perpetrating against Christians in their country and their fellow Muslim neighbors who stand up for them.

When the church in Baghdad was attacked, President Obama issued a statement that didn't even recognize that it was a church or that Christians were targeted in the attack; he merely mentioned that it was another tragic terrorist attack in Baghdad. President Obama, there's a quote from the Iroquois Indian tribe that wisely said, "The secret of the universe is the true naming of things." When we fail to call religious persecution and terrorism for what they are, we only delay that shining moment when they will be mentioned only in history. How can you whitewash the truth from what happened? How can this Administration have a policy in Iraq that completely disregards the specific targeting of vulnerable Christians by terrorists if they truly seek to stabilize the country? How can the U.S. government continue to fund "democracy" and military support in Egypt or Iraq when this Administration doesn't even understand that religious freedom is the only true bulwark against the religious intolerance and extremism that threatens security and true democracy in these countries?

The status quo in Egypt is not acceptable. Egypt has long been hailed as a democratic ally of the United States in the Middle East and, as such, has received nearly \$2 billion in foreign aid annually. It is increasingly difficult for us as Americans to maintain support for a government that is attacking the voices that would help sustain its own democracy, while defending the Islamic extremists who inflame religious intolerance. If no significant change takes place, I for one will call for the United States to reduce aid to Egypt. I don't see how we can justify taxpayer dollars that go to a regime that empowers rogue extremists to engage in these senseless acts of violence.

Security must be enhanced not only at places of worship in Iraq, but also near Christian homes and when they travel to and from work. There needs to be more training of Iraqi police and security force members to protect indigenous Christian and other minorities. We need to find a way to allow them to leave the country if they want to live in safety and freedom. And we desperately need to target these Islamist militants who are so ruthlessly exterminating minority groups in Iraq by working with the local Christian and other religious minority communities to identify and prevent security threats.

I express my deep solidarity with the Christians in Iraq and Egypt who have suffered, and the Muslims who have risked their own lives to stand up for them. These precious people are the essential fabric of societies that respect and preserve religious pluralism. May God help us to be instruments of His deliverance to all of those oppressed in the world.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing your testimonies.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Franks. We'll proceed as follows. Congresswoman Anna Eshoo was to go first. She is in a meeting, and she is coming, but out of respect we'll go with you. And I appreciate your waiting, and being willing to be flexible and go back and forth.

Representing the administration is Deputy Assistant Secretary Tamara Cofman Wittes. She has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near-Eastern Affairs since November 2009. Prior to joining the State Department, Dr. Wittes directed the Middle East Democracy and Development Center at the Brookings Institute. Welcome.

Your full statement will appear on the record. Mr. Smith is going to a meeting with the speaker and will be right back, too. So his leaving doesn't mean he wasn't interested; he's coming back. But your full statement will appear in the record. You can proceed as you see fit.

Dr. WITTES. Thank you so much, Chairman Wolf, Members of the Commission. I'm really honored by your invitation to appear today. As someone who has worked on democracy and human rights issues from outside government for a number of years, as you just noted, and now from inside government, I have long been an admirer of this commission's work, and indeed of the work of Congressman Tom Lantos, for whom it was named. Your work is a testament to his efforts, and a continuation of those. And I am pleased to have the opportunity to be here.

My work in the near-east bureau is focused on democracy and human rights. In that capacity, I work to coordinate our policy on these issues across the bureau, and I also supervise our Middle East Partnership Initiative, which is our outreach program to civil society across the region, working to promote pluralism and participation in the Middle East.

Today's meeting is convened to discuss attacks on Christian minorities in the Middle East, so let me speak very plainly. We are deeply concerned about these recent attacks on Christians, and on other religious minorities in the Middle East, including devastating attacks against the al-Qiddissin Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria on New Year's Day, and against Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad in October.

These two attacks alone resulted in the deaths of dozens of innocent people. We condemn these attacks. These are terrorist attacks. And we extend our condolences to the families whose loved ones were killed or injured. There is no cause, political, religious, or otherwise, that justifies singling out and murdering a group of innocent people.

We urge all governments to do their utmost to protect religious minorities, and we believe that governments should take affirmative steps to end institutional discrimination, and to promote respect for diversity and religious freedom amongst their citizens.

The perpetrators of these terrible crimes seek to provoke hatred and discord. They must be pursued and punished with the full force of law. We firmly believe that transparent processes, resulting in justice and accountability for those responsible, are important to send a strong signal that societies reject this violence, and that those who commit acts of violence against religious minorities will not be able to evade the consequences of their actions.

Since these horrific attacks in Iraq, and in Egypt, we've seen both governments take additional steps to protect their Christian populations and Christian community institutions. We've also seen leaders across the political and religious spectrum that have stood up publically to condemn these attacks, and to reject those who foment this violence.

President Mubarak addressed the nation of Egypt shortly after the attack in Alexandria, and called on Muslims and Christians to stand together against this type of terrorism. The Egyptian government also followed up by increasing the number of police officers and other security personnel, and security cameras, offering additional protection leading up to Coptic services on Christmas Eve.

President Mubarak has committed publically to finding those responsible for this attack. The United States government has offered our assistance, where appropriate, to bring these criminals to justice. And we will continue to follow up with the government of Egypt on this case, as we do on others.

Most heartening of all, in the wake of the Attack in Alexandria, many Egyptians came together to show their solidarity with their Coptic compatriots, and to reject those who would

sow religious division. The Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb, stated that this was an attack against all Egyptians, and that to attack a church is to attack a mosque.

On Orthodox Christmas, many Muslim Egyptians, both officials and ordinary citizens, attended church services with their Coptic brethren, or kept guard outside. As you probably know, the President and the State Department expressed our outrage at this violence and our condolences to the victims in two public statements on January first, and President Obama also made note of this attack and the one on Iraq in his declaration for Religious Freedom Day earlier this week, condemning the attacks against Christians in these two instances.

We're closely following developments in the investigation in Egypt. We've also discussed with the Egyptian government at senior levels our concerns over the need for a thorough investigation and prosecution, as well as our continued belief that Egypt would benefit from taking additional affirmative steps to guarantee the equality of all its citizens, regardless of their religious faith.

We also remain in close contact with Coptic communities and leaders in Egypt. U.S. Embassy and State Department officials, including myself personally, continue to raise these issues regularly with the Egyptian government. We see concerns in the problems that Christians face in building and maintaining church properties. We see problems in discrimination against Baha'is, in arrests and harassment of Muslims whose religious views deviate from the majority, and also in the government's treatment of Muslims who wish to convert to another religion.

We continue, also, to advocate for a unified places of worship law in Egypt, which would ensure that all faiths have equal opportunity to build and repair their places of worship. In Iraq, we remain steadfast in standing with the Iraqi people as they continue to reject repeated efforts by al-Qaeda and its affiliates to spark sectarian tension through indiscriminate violent attacks against innocent people.

Iraqi Christians, along with other minority groups in Iraq, have been targets of a number of high profile attacks since 2003. And as you know, the al-Qaeda in Iraq affiliate, the Islamic State of Iraq, claimed responsibility for that horrific attack in Baghdad on October 31st last year. Immediately following that attack, the U.S. government, through both diplomatic and military channels, worked with the government of Iraq to provide additional security for minority communities.

Ambassador Jim Jeffrey met with Prime Minister Maliki, and at the same time General Austin met with the Ministry of Interior. Prime Minister Maliki visited the Church and pledged his support to refurbish it. Additional security measures were put into place by the Iraqi government, including sweeps of churches prior to services, new checkpoint procedures, and increased patrols in predominantly Christian neighborhoods and around churches.

In addition, at the request of the Christian community, Iraq's Ministry of the Interior is providing training for members of the community to increase their own security capacity for their churches. We were encouraged to see that these additional protective measures were kept in place through the holiday season, and we are urging the Iraqi government to sustain this level of security for these communities.

I am also happy to tell you, Chairman Wolf, that in order to ensure close focus and coordination of our efforts to assist Iraq's minority communities, Ambassador Jeffrey in Baghdad has appointed Ambassador Peter Bodde, the Assistant Chief of Mission for Assistance Transition, to a unique coordinating role in the embassy, and we have established a working group at the embassy on minority issues. This is going to further strengthen our efforts, both

through assistance and outreach to minority communities, and also in our engagement with the Iraqi government.

But improving security for communal institutions is only part of the solution to the problem of violence and discrimination against Christians and other minority groups. The persecution of Christian minorities would not end, even if we could protect every Christian in every home. What's truly needed is to create an environment where diversity and religious freedom are respected, in which Christians are fully embraced by their Muslim neighbors, and thus an environment in which the extremists who try to foment sectarian violence find no quarter.

We are working to create such an environment, not only through our diplomatic engagement with governments, but also through programs, and through our outreach to civil society. And I made it a personal priority when I visited Egypt last year to meet with a group of community activists on this issue.

In Iraq, we created an interfaith cooperation project to deepen public knowledge and promote dialogue about Iraq's diverse religious heritage, enhancing religious freedom and interfaith cooperation. In this project, university students are going to make documentary films and participate in a nationwide film competition that's designed to celebrate the diversity of Iraq's religious heritage, and the richness of its faith traditions.

The office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which I supervise, works with civil society groups in Egypt and across the region to advance pluralism and participation for all citizens, and this includes programs to inculcate the value of tolerance and the respect for diversity, especially among young people.

One of the civil society groups we support in Egypt is the Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence, and they engage young Egyptians with messages of civic engagement and tolerance using SMS, text messages, and also an internet radio station. USAID's Egypt program also includes work with community groups and NGOs to advance these goals.

Ultimately, we have to try to alter the way that young people in these societies are educated about their country, and about one another, so that they come to see their Christian fellow citizens as an integral and historical part of the social fabric of their countries.

We support groups like the Andalus Center to try to realize these goals, the goals that these Christian communities articulate for themselves, to be accepted and appreciated as equals in their own societies. This is their right, and their reasonable expectation, and it's one that we do our utmost to advance through our daily diplomacy, through our programming, and through our personal engagement. I thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. WOLF. Well, thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony, and let me just at the outset say that I know you care, and I know that the administration cares. We're not inferring that there is not a -- at times, though, when you go to the embassy, particularly in Cairo, you really don't get the sense that there is this deep commitment to deal with this issue.

I've been, and at times there's just almost a reluctance to sort of just really deal with it, and sometimes it's dealt with more in a private way, rather than a public way. And at times -- I'm not going to ask you this question, but I'm just going to raise it -- when we have met with AID, both with regard to Iraq and with regard to Egypt, there's a feeling that "Well, we can't single out a particular group to give any, and yet."

So there's almost an embarrassment or a reluctance to speak out or to advocate. And at times, I think I will tell you, the ambassador in both the Bush administration and the Obama administrations -- so we're being totally non-partisan -- have really failed to be an advocate in

Egypt for the Copts, to the way that I believe they should be for anyone, the Baha'is either. It's very difficult for a Baha'i to get a driver's license, and yet they're mild-mannered people who care about their country.

So I'll just put that out there. A couple questions I would ask you. Has the FBI been asked to be involved in the investigation of the bombing in Egypt, and have they been called in with regard to the Iraqi situation?

Dr. WITTES. I can check for an update for you, Congressman, but I don't at this time know that we have received a specific request from the Egyptian government.

Mr. WOLF. Well, I think we should offer it, because every -- when things like this have taken place before, at other times, there is a legal attache for the FBI in the embassy in Cairo.

And my sense is that they ought to be -- this administration has an obligation to reach out to the Egyptian government, who we like and respect, and to the Egyptian people, to say "Can we cooperate? And how can we cooperate to make sure that you have the necessary information?"

So if you could let us know if the -- and certainly the legal attache would be the point of reference. But I think Director Muller would certainly be willing, I would think, to have a team go over and look at -- and if need be, the same thing with regard to Iraq. So if you could look at that and let us know if the FBI has been engaged, and has ATF been engaged, if you could do that.

Dr. WITTES. Thank you, Congressman. What I can tell you is that we made an offer for any assistance that we could provide that they think would be useful. That offer was made immediately after the fact by Ambassador Scobey in Cairo, and has been reiterated as recently as President Obama's phone call with President Mubarak earlier this week.

Mr. WOLF. Well, sometimes people come up to me and think of ideas I'd never even thought of. So if we just raise it, "Can we help you by doing thus and thus," that would be helpful. I think the bells rang, but you can just let me know what the status is.

Secondly, I believe, and I'd like to get your opinion, there should be one person in the embassy in Cairo, and one in Baghdad -- and I think Peter Bodde is a very good person, let me just say that. And I think Mr. Corbin has done a very good job, too -- but one person on the ground in Baghdad, and on the ground in Cairo, to be sort of an advocate or a representative of the Coptic Christians that are going through the difficulty there, working with the Egyptian government in the same way in Baghdad.

Have you ever thought of having one person designated, full-time, completely, on this issue in both Baghdad and in Cairo?

Dr. WITTES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that we are open to all good ideas on how we can better do this work, and I appreciate that suggestion. I will say that we have been working with the embassy in Cairo. In addition to the work that I discussed earlier that Ambassador Bodde's putting together in Baghdad, we have been working with our embassy in Cairo to increase our capacity on democracy and human rights issues across the board, and I think we've made some headway there.

Mr. WOLF. But I'd like to see someone in the embassy, and there's been this idea that there's a place to go when you're in either of the embassies, rather than -- because your people are very busy. They're doing this, they're doing that, they're doing something else, and all of a sudden -- and this ought to be a priority.

You know, in the Bush administration in China, there were, I think, 17 people involved in commercial attache trade in China, and one person for human rights. China is a big country. So

when you looked at the ambassadorance process in the State Department, in the Bush administration it was trade in China, not the persecution of the church, not human rights.

So we want to see that flipped a little bit, and I'd like to see if -- it would be great if you could have someone in Baghdad and someone in Cairo who would be full-time, so that the Coptic community in Egypt would know who they could go to, in the same way that the Christian community and the minority community community -- all minorities in Baghdad -- would have the same thing.

The other thing, if you would sort of look to see at AID -- AID sort of just doesn't want to get involved in this. They say "Well, we can't favor one group over," well. We've had to -- the Congress has had to put language in directing, and my sense is they ought to look at it, also. Can you have the AID people in both Baghdad and Cairo look with regard to the Coptic community and the Chaldean Assyrian community in Baghdad?

The last question I would have, since there is a vote -- and we'll come back right after the vote. And this is not my idea. This is an idea that someone smarter than me came up with. But they raised it, and I think it's a good idea. I think there ought to be a special envoy in the administration whose job is to do nothing else but to work on this problem all over the world, particularly in the middle east.

What are your thoughts on having a special envoy -- this administration has a lot of czars. It has czars for this and czars for that. Wouldn't it be helpful if we had a special envoy, similar to what Senator Danforth -- Senator Danforth did a very incredible job, I give credit to Senator Danforth, to President Bush, and also to Secretary Powell. When John Danforth was appointed as a special envoy on the north/south issue with regard to the Sudan, he did an incredible job. Wouldn't it be helpful to have a special envoy on this issue for the middle east?

Dr. WITTES. Well, thank you. I think that's a useful suggestion, and it's one that I'm certainly happy to take back. It's obviously a decision that would be made well above my pay grade.

Mr. WOLF. I understand.

Dr. WITTES. I will note that our nominee for Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom was not able to get confirmed during the last session, so that nomination has now expired. And certainly that's a position that we would hope to fill.

Mr. WOLF. But that's the world.

Dr. WITTES. Yes, sir.

Mr. WOLF. And also it did take the administration two years to appoint somebody. Personnel is policy, and the fact that they left that position vacant for so long was a signal to many of the groups, the Baha'is, the Ahmadiyyas, others, that there was not really passion at the State Department on that issue.

So I think that person's job is a portfolio for the world. I think to have someone for the middle east -- and there are some other things, which I won't go into now, other examples in other places that we could reference that would certainly be more than a full time job to deal with.

So if you could look at that and get back to the committee, I would appreciate it very, very much.

Dr. WITTES. I appreciate the suggestion, and I certainly will do so.

Mr. WOLF. Great. And thanks for your testimony. I'm very grateful. And we're just going to have a recess temporarily. I think -- is it just one vote? It's just two votes. So we should be back in about 15 minutes. So the hearing is recessed until then.

[Recess.]

Mr. WOLF. The hearing can come to order, if we can have silence. Our next witness, I want to thank Congresswoman Anna Eshoo. Congresswoman Eshoo was elected to the U.S. House of Reps in 1993. During her time in Congress, she has been a forceful advocate for human rights for people around the world. She is co-chairman of the Religious Minority in the Middle East Caucus, and an active member of the Armenian Caucus. And someone that I know care so deeply about this. So we appreciate your being here, and we'll just turn it over to you. Thank you.

Ms. ESHOO. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for inviting me to testify today. I want to begin by thanking you for your very special leadership over all of the years, and that of Congressman Jim McGovern, too. I consider you the conscience of the Congress. And that's not something that's just given; that's earned.

And you have earned that over the years because of the work that you have done on human rights throughout the world, and you have my really lasting gratitude for what you have done, and what you continue to do. And I think that it's a particularly fitting tribute to this Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and what it's all about.

Experts, as I understand it, are going to address the situation facing the Coptic Christians, so I'm going to focus my remarks on Iraq. Just by way of background, my grandparents fled the Middle East. They were Christians, and they fled with their children -- young children, my parents -- because they were being slaughtered, in plain English. They were being slaughtered. Christians were being slaughtered.

So this story is tightly woven into my American identity, and my family's history. Today, I believe that history is repeating itself. And these are the stories that were told to me at my grandparents' knees, and as I said, it's very much a part of who and what I am.

It's important to note that the Christians of Iraq, Iran, Israel, Egypt, Syria, are the oldest in the world. Christianity was, from the beginning, a Middle Eastern religion. The Assyrian Catholics, the Chaldeans -- and many people are not really aware of this -- the Chaldean rite is the oldest rite under Rome. There are 13 rites in the Catholic Church, and the Chaldean rite is the oldest. And the Chaldeans actually celebrate mass in Aramaic, which is the language that Jesus spoke.

And for 2,000 years, Christians have been a key part of the Middle Eastern community. As recently as the turn of the 20th Century, Christians comprised 20 percent of the Middle East population. In modern times, the situation for Christians, and other ethnic and religious minorities in the region, has worsened. And today they make up less than five percent of the population.

Persecution and targeted violence, including the genocidal campaign that forced my mother's Armenian family to flee the Ottoman Empire, shaped a region increasingly hostile to religious diversity.

During Saddam Hussein's regime, a large and stable Christian community persisted in Iraq. At the time of the U.S. invasion, there were some 1.4 million Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac, and other Christians in Iraq, alongside small communities of Yazidis, Mandaean, and Jews. Today, less than one third of them remain, and these ancient religious communities face complete extinction.

This tragic process began in the chaos following the U.S. invasion in 2003. And I say this not to make a political statement. This is an observation of what has occurred. But only recently has a series of high profile attacks attracted the world's attention.



On October 31st of this last year, an al-Qaeda affiliate massacred worshippers at Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation Assyrian Catholic Church, where Mass was being celebrated. Imagine people praying and celebrating Mass in the language that Jesus spoke, and the attack left more than 60 worshippers, two priests, and police dead.

On December 31st, a bomb detonated on the doorstep of two elderly Christians in Baghdad, killing both. This was one of seven Christian homes that was targeted that same evening. These attacks grab headlines, and officials issue press releases and condemn them. And they should be condemned.

The pervasive, grinding discrimination Iraqi minorities face every single day, however, doesn't really make the news. Riding the bus and shopping in markets, Iraqi Christians are threatened with death if they don't leave. Even in the face of these threats, many communities have stood resilient. Still, without real protection from the Iraqi government or anything from us, the United States, the challenge will simply prove too great. And for many it already has.

Add to the background that I just described, a bishop was murdered, and other priests have been as well. Convents have been burned, and churches set afire. Religious leaders are speaking out. In the lead up to the March elections last year, Pope Benedict XVI called on the Iraqi government to restore security for the population and the most vulnerable religious minorities.

In his Christmas address just a handful of weeks ago, he once again called for solidarity with Iraq's Christians, offering a prayer to, quote, "ease the pain and bring consolation amid their trials to the beloved Christian communities in Iraq and throughout the Middle East."

This past summer, I was able to participate -- and I know that the Chairman also participated -- in a rare summit, here in Washington, D.C., with Iraq's minority Christian leaders, each of whom expressed frustration and even desperation, because we have failed to take meaningful action to address their plight.

Their besieged congregations are dwindling, and they're afraid. In fact, they're terrified. To put it simply, as Christians and other minorities disappear from the country, I really fear the prospect for a pluralistic and democratic Iraq, that that will vanish with them.

In Congress, we've been working for several years -- Congressman Wolf, the co-chairs of the Religious Minorities in the Middle East Caucus, as well as several others, dedicated members -- to bring this situation to light.

During the previous administration it was very difficult, I think, to get the foreign policy establishment to recognize that the invasion had precipitated this humanitarian crisis. And in the current administration, attention to this issue may have improved somewhat, but most frankly not as quickly -- and to bring the relief to the Christians in this situation, and the deterioration of the situation.

The appointment of the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Michael Corbin, has been welcomed, to focus on religious minorities. But we have to do more. We just simply have to do more, working across party lines: this is not a partisan issue in any way, shape or form.

Congress directed specific funding in Fiscal 2009 and 10 towards protection and development efforts for Iraq's religious minorities. But the distribution of these funds has not been transparent, and I've been told repeatedly by people on the ground that many of the communities don't even know about the availability.

This money and this effort, I think, is too important to lose in any bureaucracy. For the sake of our constituents, who are the taxpayers, and for the struggling minorities in Iraq, we need to account for this money, and refocus our efforts.

So at my request, more than a dozen house colleagues and four Senators have joined in requesting that the GAO conduct an audit of the funds. This is already taking place, and the GAO is going to report back to the Congress on this. I don't doubt the good intentions of the State Department and USAID, but crises call for more than good intentions. I feel strongly that the administration must lay out a comprehensive strategy.

I don't know, they've talked about a basket, or a market basket, or something to that effect. But this is not reaching the people that are affected. We know that, so we need to be doing more. Such a strategy must articulate specifically, specifically, how we will distribute assistance, protect these communities, and work with the Iraqi government to identify and prosecute those who attack them.

The strategy, I believe, must also include a streamlined mechanism for asylum-seekers to immigrate to the United States. The religious leadership have stated and restated this over and over again. I think we have a responsibility to accommodate those Christians for whom the situation has become impossible, even as we work to improve conditions there. And the future of these ancient communities, and indeed the result of our very costly efforts in Iraq, may well depend on it.

So, Mr. Chairman, my colleague Mr. Holt, and to everyone that has been a part of this Human Rights Commission, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, we have yet another crisis to deal with in the world. I think, as Americans who believe in a pluralistic society where we value so highly in our Constitution the place of faith in our nation, this is part of our values. And this is one of the most important values that we export around the world, that this be front and center in terms of the work that you do here.

You know that you have my ongoing commitment. I think this is a sorrowful situation, and people are enduring a great deal. There is no question that Christians are targeted. Christians are targeted. So that's the work that is before us. I will work with you to help bring the relief and the notice that this deserves, and I hope that we can really move this up the set of priorities in the State Department, because I think these people deserve it. In fact, they are desperate for it.

Thank you very much. It's an honor to appear before you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Eshoo of California follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ANNA ESHOO, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AND MEMBER OF THE TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

I want to begin by thanking each of my colleagues who are here today, with special thanks to Chairman Frank Wolf and Chairman Jim McGovern. I consider you the "Conscience of the Congress" and the work you do on the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is a fitting tribute to our late colleague. I'm particularly grateful that you've called this hearing on a topic of such personal significance to me. Experts will address the tragic situation facing the Coptic Christians, but I will focus my remarks on Iraq.

My grandparents fled the Middle East because Christians were being slaughtered, so this story is tightly woven into my American identity and my family history. Today, history is repeating itself. It is important to note that the Christians of Iraq, Iran, Israel, Egypt, and Syria are the oldest in the world. Christianity was, from the beginning, a Middle Eastern religion. The Assyrian Christians, the Chaldeans, actually celebrate Mass in Aramaic, which is the language Jesus spoke. And for two thousand years, Christians have been a key part of the Middle Eastern community. As recently as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Christians comprised 20% of the Middle East population.

In modern times, the situation for Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities in the region has worsened—today, they make up less than 5% of the population. Persecution and targeted violence, including the genocidal campaign that forced my mother's Armenian family to flee the Ottoman Empire, shaped a region increasingly hostile to religious diversity. During Saddam Hussein's regime, a large and stable Christian community

persisted in Iraq. At the time of the U.S. invasion, there were some 1.4 million Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac and other Christians in Iraq, alongside small communities of Yazidis, Mandaean and Jews. Today, less than one-third of them remain, and these ancient religious communities face complete extinction.

This tragic process began in the chaos following the U.S. invasion in 2003, but only recently has a series of high-profile attacks attracted the world's attention. On October 31, 2010, an Al Qaeda affiliate massacred worshipers at Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation Assyrian Catholic Church where Mass was being celebrated, leaving more than sixty worshipers, priests, and police dead. On December 31<sup>st</sup> a bomb detonated on the doorstep of two elderly Christians in Baghdad, killing both. This was one of seven Christian homes targeted that same evening. These attacks grab headlines, and officials issue press releases and condemn them. The pervasive, grinding discrimination Iraqi minorities face every single day, however, does not make the news. Riding the bus and shopping in markets, Iraqi Christians are threatened with death if they don't leave. Even in the face of these threats, many communities have stood resilient. Still, without real protection from the Iraqi government or from us, the challenge will simply prove too great. For many, it already has.

Religious leaders are speaking out. In the lead-up to the March elections last year, Pope Benedict XVI called on the Iraqi government to restore security for the population and the most vulnerable religious minorities. In his Christmas address a few weeks ago, he once again called for solidarity with Iraq's Christians, offering a prayer to "ease the pain and bring consolation amid their trials to the beloved Christian communities in Iraq and throughout the Middle East."

This past summer, I was able to participate in a rare summit here in Washington with Iraq's minority religious leaders, each of whom expressed frustration, and even desperation, because we have failed to take meaningful action to address their plight. Their besieged congregations are dwindling and afraid. To put it very simply, as Christians and other minorities disappear from the country, I fear the prospect for a pluralistic and democratic Iraq will vanish with them.

In Congress, I've been working for several years with Representative Wolf, who Co-Chairs the Religious Minorities in the Middle East Caucus, as well as several other dedicated Members to bring this situation to light. During the previous Administration, it was, frankly, very difficult to get anyone to admit that our invasion had precipitated this humanitarian crisis. In the current Administration, attention to this issue has improved somewhat, but not as quickly as the situation for Christians in Iraq has deteriorated. The appointment of Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Corbin to focus on religious minorities was a welcome move, but we must do more.

Working across party lines, Congress directed specific funding in Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010 toward protection and development efforts for Iraq's religious minorities. Unfortunately, the distribution of those funds has not been transparent, and I've been told repeatedly by people "on the ground" that many of the communities don't even know it's available. This money—and this effort—is too important to lose in the bureaucracy.

For the sake of our constituents—the taxpayers, and for the struggling minorities in Iraq, we must account for this money and refocus our efforts. At my request, more than a dozen House colleagues and four Senators joined me in requesting the GAO conduct an audit of the funds. This is already taking place and GAO will report back on the distribution of funds and their effectiveness.

I don't doubt the good intentions of the State Department and USAID, but crises call for more than good intentions. I feel strongly that the Administration must lay out a comprehensive strategy for assisting Iraq's ethno-religious minorities. Such a strategy must articulate specifically how we will distribute assistance, protect these communities, and work with the Iraqi government to identify and prosecute those who attack them. The strategy must also include a streamlined mechanism for asylum-seekers to immigrate to the U.S. We have a responsibility to accommodate those Christians for whom the situation in Iraq has become impossible, even as we work to improve conditions there. The future of these ancient communities, and indeed, the result of our very costly efforts in Iraq, may well depend on it.

I thank the Chairmen for this opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to hearing from our other witnesses.

Mr. WOLF. I have a question for you. Thank you very much for your testimony. I appreciate it very much, and I commit to do everything that we can to see if we can resolve or solve the problem, so we just don't have another hearing, and then people move on, and then nothing happens. There's two questions I wanted to ask to get your opinion on.

One, there are a couple of us that are talking about doing two things. One, asking the administration to have one person in Baghdad and one person in Cairo, specifically to advocate

for the minorities in Baghdad, the Christians, and also the Coptics in Egypt, as well as the Baha'is, to really advocate, to be on the scene, to be there. To not come out of Washington every so many months, but to be there on the scene. Your thoughts about that?

Ms. ESHOO. Well, I would welcome that. You and I have had many conversations about who our contact is, how effective they can be. And I think if it's left to one individual that may be here stateside, that has to do some kind of shuttle diplomacy and get lost in all of that bureaucracy, it doesn't work very well. And all we have to do is to look to the past.

So I would welcome what you describe. But what I want to reiterate is that those that are kind of above these individuals have to know that their work has to be taken seriously. So there has to be the policy overlay. But I would welcome what you describe.

Mr. WOLF. Well, we will try to get a letter off next year asking that. The second one -- and you're really ahead of it -- deals with the whole issue of the policy thing. We're talking about introducing legislation to create a special envoy, or asking the administration to have a special envoy for religious minorities in the middle east, comparable really to Senator Mitchell. Comparable to what John Danforth did with regard to the situation in Sudan.

Your thoughts about having a special envoy, a policy person -- similar to what Holbrooke did with regard to Pakistan, similar to what Senator Mitchell does with regard to the middle east -- your thoughts about having a special envoy for religious minorities in the middle east to advocate -- so it is at the policy level in addition to at the operational level.

Ms. ESHOO. Well, Mr. Chairman, I welcome what you are saying and I would support it. And I would, because I think that it would be an eloquent statement on the part of the United States of America to have such an individual that is charged with carrying out this cherished American value.

And the people on the ground in the various countries would see that, and I think that it would, again, be an eloquent statement. It would say that we are serious, and that in that seriousness, the policies -- regardless of administration, because this would become the template, I would say -- would be most welcome.

And I think the people that are being targeted deserve this. So I would support that effort. I think it's a very important one, and I think it's an excellent idea.

Mr. WOLF. Okay. We'll work with your office for a letter, and also for legislation. And I think if you were to have -- and I'm going to go to Mr. Holt next -- if you were to have someone with a caliber of former Senator Mitchell, who has such credibility, or former Senator John Danforth, who had such credibility on the issue of Sudan -- to have the same person like that type, non-political, non-partisan, but someone who they know could pick up the telephone and call the Secretary of State -- I'm sure if Senator Mitchell calls Secretary Clinton, she takes the call -- and also someone who could call the President of the United States.

So we'll work on the letter together, and we'll work on the legislation.

Ms. ESHOO. I just wanted to add, too, Mr. Chairman, my thanks to all of the advocates. There was some applause in the room, and I thank people for that after I finish speaking, but as we know in the jobs that we have and our responsibilities, advocates are absolutely essential in all of these efforts.

And the advocacy groups and organizations have been untiring and unrelenting, and I think that we all salute them. I want to pay special tribute to them.

Mr. WOLF. I agree, Anna, very much. Congressman Holt, and then after that Mr. Pitts, and then we'll let you go, Anna.

Mr. HOLT. Thank you. Rather than a question, I just wanted to underscore what Representative Eshoo has brought to us here. I think it is compelling and heartfelt testimony, and I think you are absolutely right to draw attention to the large number of people here who represent advocates, in the United States and in the middle east, for the rights of religious minorities.

Clearly, Christians are targeted. But of course, we must speak out for protection of religious minorities, Baha'is and others, as well. It's not a matter of exporting American ideas: after all, their forefathers were in these countries long before the United States of America. It's a matter of international human rights and religious freedom.

These are principles that we should uphold at every turn, and I think the Chair -- and I do thank Chairman Wolf and his co-chair for holding this hearing -- I think his idea of having on-scene, in the embassies, all the time, with this specific responsibility of looking after the rights of Christians and religious minorities in these countries is good.

I think the idea of a special envoy is good. I think what you have laid out, Representative Eshoo, is a very compelling program of protection of these people, and I thank you. And I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you, Rush. Congressman Pitts?

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am sorry that I am late. We all have other meetings to go to, but I'll just be brief. Christians are increasingly under attack and siege in Egypt and Iraq. I have long been concerned about the violence against the Coptic Christians in Egypt. Every time I see President Mubarak, he kind of goes like this, because I keep raising the issue with him, going back to Al-Kosheh.

And of course, thousands of Christians have now fled Iraq. It's a very big concern. We're over there giving our lives, precious lives of our young men and women, and our resources for this country. They should stand up to provide security for the minority groups that are persecuted in these countries. So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for holding a hearing on this issue. And I look forward to hearing our witnesses.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you, Mr. Pitts, and thank you, Anna, for your testimony. I just want to say, too, I want to second what you said about all the advocate groups. I would say, just speaking for myself, I think the church in the west, all denominations, have an obligation to advocate on this issue.

Because if the church in the west -- and I use that in a universal way -- will not advocate and speak out for the persecuted -- we appreciate everyone who's here, but then those who aren't here, this is something that ought to resonate in their publications, and to advocate and to speak out, whatever the denomination.

Because, as we mentioned earlier, the Baha'is have been having a very tough time in Iran. The Baha'is have a tough time in Egypt. So it would be helpful if the church in the west would be an advocate for them. But thank you very much for your testimony.

Ms. ESHOO. Thank you. And thank you again for your magnificent work, and we will work shoulder to shoulder. And I agree with you about the religious leadership in the west. That really needs to be organized. Those voices need to join the chorus that's already there.

No one can be missing in action in this. We have spoken about it together, and we've got to put out a clarion call to everyone. So thank you very much, and to Mr. Pitts, thank you for being part of the caucus early on. You've helped to make a real difference. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you. The next panel will be the following. First, we will have Sister Rita, who is an Iraqi Catholic Sister. We are protecting her identity by limiting her biographical information, and she will testify from behind a screen. And at this time, we would ask all the cameramen to back up so their cameras cannot view into the screen area.

Also, we will have Dina Guirguis. Dina Guirguis is the Keston Family Research Fellow in the Washington Institute's Project Fikra. Prior to joining the Washington Institute, Ms. Guirguis was the executive director of Voices for a Democratic Egypt, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Egypt.

Next, we will have Michele Dunne. Michele Dunne is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an editor of the online journal the Arab Reform Bulletin, a former specialist on middle east affairs at the U.S. Department of State, and White House. She has served at assignments including the National Security Council staff, the Secretary of State's policy planning staff, the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem, and the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and research.

And last, but certainly not least, someone who we work together on a number of these issues, Nina Shea. Nina Shea has served as commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom since its founding in 1999. She is also a senior scholar at the Hudson Institute, where she directs the Center for Religious Freedom. I want to thank all four witnesses for coming to testify, and maybe we'll go in the order that -- starting with Nina. Nina, we're starting with you. I've just been told that's the way it's going to be.

Ms. SHEA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, members of Congress. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on the worsening plight of Christian minorities in Iraq and Egypt, and I do agree with Congresswoman Eshoo that Mr. Wolf, you have been the conscience of the Congress on this issue. You have been holding hearings for many years, and issuing statements on these beleaguered minorities. And we have now reached the point where we believe that, USCIRF believes, that there is an ongoing religious cleansing taking place, that these are not isolated events.

For those of us in this room, these recent atrocities against the Iraqi church on October 31st, and the Egypt church on January 1 of this year, did not occur in a vacuum. These are not isolated one-off events. In Egypt, for the past two years we've seen a dramatic upsurge in attacks against the Copts, while in Iraq churches have been targeted at least since 2004.

And while the violence in the country has decreased overall, attacks against the Christians have increased. This fall, and al-Qaeda group has explicitly linked the Christian communities of Iraq and Egypt in its threat to kill Christians wherever they can be reached.

French President Sarkozy has also called it a religious cleansing, and Italy, Poland, Hungary, and France are joining together to bring this issue before the E.U. later this month. Meanwhile, the U.S. Administration is offering only its condolences, and treating each event as if they were isolated acts.

Clearly, the governments of both nations have failed to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief, especially for the religious minorities, including the Christian minorities, which have been in Egypt and Iraq for nearly 2,000 years.

In Egypt, USCIRF has found serious, widespread, and long-standing human rights violations against religious minorities, as well as disfavored Muslims. Confronted by these violations, the Egyptian government has failed to take the necessary steps to halt the discrimination and repression against Christians and other minorities.

Too often it has failed to punish the violators. This failure to mete out justice continues to foster a climate of impunity, making further attacks likely. For many years, Egypt's only response to the murder, and even to massacres of Christians, has been to conduct reconciliation sessions between Muslims and Christians in order to ease tensions and solve disputes.

This response is problematic and disturbing. The New Year's Day bombing in Alexandria, the worst sectarian attack targeting Christians in a decade, led to President Obama's call to bring the attackers to justice for this barbaric and heinous act. USCIRF calls on the administration to follow through on the President's words, and press Cairo to hold all those who were involved accountable.

Following the bombing, USCIRF urged Egypt to take visible steps to protect Coptic places of worship before, during, and after the Coptic Christmas of January 7. The Egyptian government heeded our call, and Christmas came and went without incident. However, we must not forget that on the eve of last year's Coptic Christmas a drive-by shooting in Nag Hammadi killed six Christians and a Muslim guard.

While we commend the recent verdict handed down earlier this week against one of the three alleged perpetrators, since 2008 there have been dozens of violent attacks against Coptic Christians.

These attacks, again, are not happening in a vacuum. And I should say that there was a recent attack, just on January 11th, on a train, where a Christian man was killed and several Christian women were wounded while the gunman yelled Allahu Akbar. So these are continuing, and they're not happening in a vacuum. The context is a government that has failed to make the rights of religious minorities a priority, whereas Egypt's government-controlled media and government-controlled mosques have engaged in incitement to violence.

In recent months, Egyptian officials have spoken out against this incitement to violence, and have temporarily shut down several TV satellite stations, including El-Nas and Al-Rahma. But as Egypt's presidential elections approach, more must be done to protect religious minority communities and prosecute those who assault their members.

Since 2002, Egypt has been on USCIRF's watch list. Our watch list includes countries whose religious freedom violations are serious enough to warrant close monitoring, but not quite so serious as to be characterized as systematic, ongoing and egregious, which is the threshold for being designated a country of particular concern, or a CPC.

Given the worsening religious freedom conditions in Egypt, and with a few exceptions, the country's repeated failure to address the climate of impunity and otherwise adjust its own laws to ensure that people understand the need to respect the freedom of religion or belief of all persons, USCIRF will undertake a thorough and searching review of whether Egypt now meets the criteria for designation as a CPC.

This designation, if made by the United States government, would be a very serious matter. Once a country is designated a CPC, the President is required, in the absence of special circumstances, to take specific actions against that nation as specified in the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. These actions can include economic or other sanctions, travel bans on government officials connected with religious freedom violations, and various limitations on aid and other foreign assistance.

The United States should urge Egypt to discontinue the counterproductive reconciliation sessions as a bypass for promptly investigating violence against Copts and other vulnerable religious minorities, vigorously bringing perpetrators to justice while compensating the victims.

In addition, the Egyptian government should heighten security at Christian and other non-Muslim places of worship, particularly in the current climate, where religious minorities are increasingly vulnerable to extremist attacks. Equally important, the U.S. should urge the Egyptian government to address incitement to violence and discrimination against both Muslims and non-Muslims by ending government subsidies and licenses to media and religious institutions that incite to violence, prosecuting clerics and others who incite to violence, dismissing or disciplining those employed or sponsored by the government espousing intolerance, publically and officially repudiating such incitement and discrimination, no matter its source, and rescinding any prior fatwas issued by Al-Azhar that discriminate or incite violence against Muslims or non-Muslim religious communities.

Turning to Iraq, USCIRF continues to recommend CPC designation, which it has done so for Iraq since 2008. The plight of Iraq's smallest religious minorities, including Christians, and also Sabian Mandeans and Yazidis, remains a desperate one.

Victimized by discrimination, marginalization, displacement, and violence, they do not receive adequate protection and justice from the state, and lack the militia or tribal structures needed to defend themselves in the absence of government protection. As a result, Christians and other small minorities have been emigrating in mass numbers, while those remaining in Iraq fear for their safety.

And just today, the New York Times has a detailed account of the last Christian man in a town in Anbar province, and it really is just a heartbreaking story where he says that his life is now identical to his Muslim neighbors, that he cannot raise his own child in the Christian faith, that there are no priests, that the church is completely empty.

The culprits against these Iraqi Christians are largely the same who attacked the Shi'ites, Sunni extremists. The difference is in the goal of these attacks. The purpose of the attacks against the Shi'a majority is to trigger a civil war and bring down the government. But the goal of the attacks against Iraq's non-Muslim minorities is to isolate their members and rid the nation of their presence.

Speaking after the October church attack, Wijdan Michael, Iraq's human rights minister and herself a Christian, summed it up perfectly when she said it was an attempt to, quote, "empty Iraq of Christians."

This brutal, unrelenting campaign of religious cleansing began in October of '04, when five churches were bombed in Baghdad and Mosul. On a single day in July '09, seven churches were bombed in a coordinated attack in Baghdad. Christian clergy and others have been targeted, including Paulos Rahho, the Archbishop of Mosul, who was kidnapped and killed in early '08. Last May, a bus convoy of Christian students traveling to the University of Mosul was violently assaulted.

During these terrible years, Christians from every walk of life have been raped, tortured, kidnapped, beheaded, and evicted from their homes. In 2003, there were at least 800,000, and as many as 1.4 million Christians living in Iraq. It is now estimated that only half of that community remains in the country.

Since the October 31st attack, the violence has continued. Just a few days after it, bomb and mortar attacks were launched against Christian homes in Baghdad, killing at least five and injuring 30. On December 30th, 10 more bomb attacks targeted Christian areas in that city, killing two and wounding 20.

These latest attacks have led to further waves of Christians fleeing Baghdad and Mosul. What has Iraq done in response to the existential threat to its Christian minority community?



Clearly not enough. USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government put more pressure on Iraq to make sure that the guilty parties are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Further, it recommends that the U.S. and Iraqi governments, in consultation with Christian and other religious minority communities, upgrade security, identifying vulnerable targets for terrorists and implementing a plan for Iraqi military protection of these areas. The U.S. and Iraq should also work to establish, fund, train and deploy local police units to provide additional protection. And I also think that the United States could be doing a lot more to share intelligence with religious leaders in both countries when they know of impending attacks and threats.

We also recommend that the U.S. do more to assure that its development assistance programming prioritizes areas where vulnerable religious minorities are concentrated, including the Nineveh Plains area. There is a great need for the refugees outside the country, as well. The Catholic bishop of Aleppo has said that the refugees, the Christian refugees in Damascus, some of them are actually turning to prostitution in order to feed their children.

We urge the U.S. government to speedily process vulnerable Iraqi refugees who wish to resettle in the United States, in part by ensuring that there are enough people to conduct background and screening procedures in a timely manner, and that the existing waiver, the material support bar, is properly applied to individuals forced to provide support to terrorists under duress.

Finally, USCIRF has long urged the U.S. to press Saudi Arabia to clean up its textbooks, which incite violence against the religious other. There simply can't be a culture of tolerance in the middle east as long as Saudi Arabia continues to export these educational materials, as they do, and as they post on the internet website, their website. This is the national curriculum.

Mr. Chairman, you have proposed a special envoy and experts on religious minorities based in the embassies. I like that idea very much; in fact, USCIRF has been recommending for a number of years now to have these kind of human rights monitors, just devoted to human rights, in the embassy in Baghdad. So I think it is a great idea, and to have an envoy dealing with policy.

I have seen firsthand, as you have, how Senator Danforth made an enormous difference, and we're actually celebrating a successful referendum in South Sudan today that started, really, with John Danforth being able to focus on policy steps for South Sudan.

An audit is also something that USCIRF has long recommended. In the case of both countries, Egypt and Iraq, we are talking about allies of the United States, governments with which we have a strong relationship, and to which we give billions of dollars in aid annually. It is time to act decisively on behalf of the fundamental human rights of freedom of religion or belief, especially for religious minorities, including Christians.

Not only is this a moral imperative, but Congress should understand that this is good for security: our security, the security of all the nations involved, and global security. The Christian communities of both of these countries are important moderating influences in the region.

Finally, in the case of Iraq, we have a special obligation to render our assistance while our presence remains in that nation. The transition from dictatorship to political democracy must include the protection of religious freedom. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Shea follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NINA SHEA, COMMISSIONER, U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Chairman, Members of Congress, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on the worsening plight of Christian minorities in Iraq and Egypt.

The October 31 violent siege of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Baghdad, Iraq during Sunday mass and the New Year's Day bombing attack against Coptic Christians emerging from a church service in Alexandria, Egypt, sent shock waves around the world.

But for those of us here in this room, these horrific atrocities did not occur in a vacuum. In Egypt, for the past two years, we've seen a dramatic upsurge in attacks against Copts, while in Iraq, churches have been targeted at least since 2004, and while the violence in the country has decreased overall, attacks against the Christians have increased. This fall, an al Qaeda group has explicitly linked the Christian communities of Iraq and Egypt in its threats to kill Christians.

Clearly, the governments of both nations have failed to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief, especially for religious minorities, including Christian communities which have been in Egypt and Iraq for nearly two thousand years.

Speaking for USCIRF, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on which I serve as a Commissioner, we believe that the United States and the community of nations have a fundamental obligation to address the violence and protect those religious minorities.

**Egypt**

In Egypt, USCIRF has found serious, widespread, and long-standing human rights violations against religious minorities, as well as disfavored Muslims. Confronted by these violations, the Egyptian government has failed to take the necessary steps to halt the discrimination and repression against Christians and other minorities. Too often, it has failed to punish the violators. This failure to mete out justice continues to foster a climate of impunity, making further attacks likely.

For many years, Egypt's only response to the murder, and even to massacres, of Christians has been to conduct "reconciliation" sessions between Muslims and Christians in order to ease tensions and resolve disputes. This response is problematic and disturbing. In its 2009 annual human rights report on Egypt, the State Department concluded that these sessions not only "prevented the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and precluded their recourse to the judicial system for restitution," but also "contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults."

The New Year's Day bombing in Alexandria -- the worst sectarian attack targeting Christians in a decade -- led to President Obama's call to bring the attackers "to justice for this barbaric and heinous act." USCIRF calls on the Administration to follow through on the President's words and press Cairo to hold all those who were involved accountable.

Following the bombing, USCIRF urged Egypt to take visible steps to protect Coptic places of worship before, during, and after the Coptic Christmas of January 7. The Egyptian government heeded our call and Christmas came and went without incident.

However, we must not forget that on the eve of last year's Coptic Christmas, a drive-by shooting in Naga Hammadi killed six Christians and a Muslim guard. While we commend the recent verdict handed down earlier this week against one of the three alleged perpetrators, since 2008, there have been dozens of violent attacks against Coptic Christians.

These attacks, again, are not happening in a vacuum. The context is a government that has failed to make the rights of religious minorities a priority. Worse, Egypt's government-controlled media and government-funded mosques have engaged in incitement to violence.

In recent months, Egyptian officials have spoken out against this incitement to violence, and temporarily shut down several satellite TV stations, including Al-Nas and Al-Rahma. But as Egypt's presidential elections approach, more must be done to protect religious minority communities and prosecute those who assault their members.

Since 2002, Egypt has been on USCIRF's Watch List. Our Watch List includes countries whose religious freedom violations are serious enough to warrant close monitoring but not quite as serious to be characterized as "systematic, ongoing, and egregious," which is the threshold for being designated a "country of particular concern" or a CPC.

Given the worsening religious freedom conditions in Egypt, and, with few exceptions, the country's repeated failure to address the climate of impunity and otherwise adjust its own laws to ensure that people understand the need to respect the freedom of religion or belief of all persons, USCIRF will undertake a thorough and searching review of whether Egypt now meets the criteria for designation as a CPC. This designation, if made

by the United States government, would be a very serious matter. Once a country is designated a CPC, the President is required – in the absence of special circumstances – to take specific actions against that nation, as specified in the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. These actions can include economic or other sanctions, travel bans on government officials connected with religious freedom violations, and various limitations on aid and other foreign assistance.

The United States should urge Egypt to discontinue the counterproductive “reconciliation” sessions as a bypass for promptly investigating violence against Copts and other vulnerable religious minorities, vigorously bringing the perpetrators to justice, while compensating the victims. In addition, the Egyptian government should heighten security at Christian and other non-Muslim places of worship, particularly in the current climate where religious minorities are increasingly vulnerable to extremist attacks.

Equally important, the U.S. should urge the Egyptian government to address incitement to violence and discrimination against both Muslims and non-Muslims by ending government subsidies and licenses to media and religious institutions that incite to violence; prosecuting clerics and other who incite violence; dismissing or disciplining those employed or sponsored by the government espousing intolerance; publicly and officially repudiating such incitement and discrimination no matter its source; and rescinding any prior fatwas issued by Al-Azhar that discriminate or incite violence against any Muslim or non-Muslim religious minority communities.

### **Iraq**

While USCIRF considers recommending a CPC designation for Egypt, it has continued to recommend that designation since 2008 for Iraq.

The plight of Iraq’s smallest religious minorities, including Christians and also Sabeen Mandeans, and Yazidis, remains a desperate one. Victimized by discrimination, marginalization, displacement and violence, they do not receive adequate protection and justice from the state and lack the militia or tribal structures necessary to defend themselves in the absence of government protection. As a result, Christians and other small religious minorities have been emigrating in mass numbers, while those remaining in Iraq fear for their safety.

In one sense, the attacks launched against Christians resemble the continued atrocities against Iraq’s Shi’a Muslims. The culprits are largely the same – Sunni extremists. The difference is in the goal of these attacks. The purpose of the attacks against the Shi’a majority is to trigger a civil war and bring down the government. But the goal of the attacks against Iraq’s non-Muslim minorities is to isolate their members and rid the nation of their presence. Speaking after the October 31 attack on Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Wijdan Michael, Iraq’s human rights minister and herself a Christian, summed it up perfectly when she said it was an attempt “to empty Iraq of Christians.”

This brutal, unrelenting campaign of religious cleansing began in August 2004, when five churches were bombed in Baghdad and Mosul. On a single day in July 2009, 7 churches were bombed in a coordinated attack in Baghdad. Christian clergy and other leaders have been targeted, including Paulos Rahho, the Archbishop of Mosul, who was kidnapped and killed in early 2008. Last May, a bus convoy of Christian students traveling to their university in Mosul was violently assaulted. During these terrible years, Christians from every walk of life have been raped, tortured, kidnapped, beheaded, and evicted from their homes.

In 2003, there were at least 800,000 and as many as 1.4 million Christians living in Iraq; it is now estimated that only half of that community remains in the country.

Since the October 31 attack which caught the world’s attention, the violence has continued. Just a few days later, bomb and mortar attacks were launched against Christian homes in Baghdad, killing at least 5 and injuring 30. On December 30, 10 more bomb attacks targeted Christian areas in that city, killing 2 and wounding 20. These latest attacks have led to further waves of Christians fleeing Baghdad and Mosul.

What has Iraq done in response to the existential threat to its Christian minority community?

Following the October 31 church attack, senior officials, including Prime Minister al Maliki, President Talabani, and KRG President Barzani, as well as two prominent Shi’a leaders, promptly condemned the atrocity. Moreover, individual suspects have been arrested. Since the October 31 attack, the government has also increased security at churches and in Christian areas.

While USCIRF applauds these actions, it strongly recommends that the U.S. government put more pressure on Iraq to make sure that the guilty parties are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Further, it recommends that the U.S. and Iraqi governments -- in consultation with Christian and other religious minority communities -- upgrade security, identifying vulnerable targets for terrorists and implementing a plan for Iraqi military protection of these areas. The U.S. and Iraq should also work to establish, fund, train, and deploy local police units to provide additional protection.

We also recommend that the U.S. do more to ensure that its developmental assistance programming prioritizes areas where vulnerable religious communities are concentrated, including the Nineveh Plains area.

Finally, we urge the U.S. government to engage in speedy processing of vulnerable Iraqi refugees who wish to be resettled in the United States, in part by ensuring that there are enough people to conduct background and screening procedures in a timely manner, and that the existing waiver of the material support bar is properly applied to individuals forced to provide support to terrorists under duress.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the case of both countries – Egypt and Iraq – we are talking about allies of the United States, governments with which we have strong relationships and to which we give billions of dollars in aid annually. It is time to act decisively on behalf of the fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief, especially for religious minorities, including Christians.

Not only is this a moral imperative, but Congress should understand that this is good for security – our security, the security of both nations, and global security.

Moreover, the continued threat against the Christian communities of both countries undermines an important moderating influence in the region.

Finally, in the case of Iraq, we have a special obligation to render our assistance while our presence remains in that nation. The transition from dictatorship to political democracy must include the protection of religious freedom.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you, Nina. The next witness will be Sister Rita, who is an Iraqi Catholic sister.

SISTER RITA. Thank you, Chairman Wolf and Chairman McGovern, for the opportunity to share my testimony before these bodies today. My thank you especially to Congress Chris Smith for his invitation. You invited me to speak to you about the reality on the ground for Iraqi Christians, as I will do.

But I cannot speak for the Iraqi Christian reality outside the context of the whole of Iraq. It is safe to say, without a hint of exaggeration, that the trauma of war has imprinted itself on the baddies minds, and the spirit of every Iraqi citizen.

We are now a people 26 million strong whose identity has been forged more by death, grief, suffering, trauma, and pain than by any greed or political ideology. This is the context for the persecution of Iraqi minorities, including Christians.

It requires the urgent attention of this Congress and the commitment of the international community. Last year was the most violent for Christians since the war began. The minority are paying heavy prices because they don't have militia to protect them.

In a Christian village nearby Mosul, the parish of the village had been providing transportation to the students to go to Mosul University. Buses have been attacked multiple times in the past five years. For example, May 2nd last year, four buses filled with Christian students and teachers were attacked on their way to the university by terrorists using a well-coordinated series of car bombs, roadside IEDs, and weapons fire.

One hundred forty-four students were injured. About 45 of them suffered severe facial disfigurement. One student, 19 years old, Sandy, a first year biology major, lay in severe critical condition in a coma for a week before she died. A medical professional I know who worked at the hospital where the wounded students were taken, he had to go twice to his house to change his clothes because they were blood-soaked.

According to a witness, my relative among them, when the buses were attacked the students ran from them, looking for help. They found more terror instead, as the perpetrators opened fire on them. They were covered with blood as the bullets shot off ears, eyes, fingers, and legs. The victims relied on the kindness of the village from a Muslim farming community, who unloaded their animals from their pickup trucks and transported the students to the closest hospital.

After that attack, the Christian students were threatened by the terrorists, who said that the men would be killed and the women would be kidnapped. As a result, nearly all Christian students from the village of Nineveh Plain, they stay at home in the village, where there is no opportunity for higher education or meaningful employment.

But what will become of them? I have returned home to Iraq twice since the invasion. The Iraqi Christian community has been very patient, working toward a hope for that new Iraq that will provide the peaceful and secure environment we need to live happy, productive, and useful lives in our homeland.

Yet year after year, our situation has deteriorated. People cannot live healthy, productive life under this kind of pressure. One of our sisters, who works in a maternal hospital in Baghdad, said she noticed an increase in the number of women asking for C-sections, not for any medical reason, but because they longed for the peace they believe they will experience under anesthesia.

You brought me here today to tell my people's story. Perhaps even now it is difficult for you to grasp the real sense of the words I speak. Does it all seem remote from your everyday experience? Perhaps not, if you have a loved one serving in the U.S. military in Iraq or Afghanistan. Perhaps not, if you recall what happened in Tucson twelve days ago.

The terror, confusion, suffering, grief, and pain that the people of Tucson experienced is a glimpse at the experience of every Iraqi, whether they live in Iraq or are counted among the 50,000 or so Iraqi refugees that have arrived in the U.S. since 2008.

What is the cost of this violence? The people of Iraq need the U.S. to fulfill its moral obligation to help repair the damage that the war has caused, and we need a stable, secure home where we can begin to heal the wounded of trauma that are the most painful and destructive consequences of this disastrous conflict.

The trauma of Iraqi Christians who continue to believe that there is reason -- there remains Iraqi Christians who continue to believe that there is reason to hope for a better future. In spite of all, we find hope most often when situations seem most hopeless.

This meeting here today encouraged me. Are we willing to try? Are we willing not to give up? Are we willing to realize that the United States needed to be liberated from the violence and trauma of this war as much as Iraqis do? Then come, let's work together.

My recommendation: the U.S. government should continue to work with the government of Iraq to protect religious minorities in Iraq. The U.S. should continue resettlement as an option for Iraqi refugees. The U.S. should consider P2 for Iraqi religious minorities, so that individual Iraqis can apply directly to the U.S. for resettlement. The U.S. should consider establishing safe home in countries of first asylum where there are vulnerable Iraqi refugees, especially women and children, at risk for trafficking. Security clearances for Iraqi refugees already approved for resettlement should be expedited. Thank you so much.

[The prepared statement of Sister Rita follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF SISTER RITA, ORDER OF PREACHERS

Thank you Honorable Chairman Wolf and Chairman McGovern for the opportunity to share my testimony before these bodies today. My thanks especially to the Honorable Chris Smith for his invitation.

For purposes of today's testimony I am Sister Rita. I am a Catholic citizen of Iraq and a member of a worldwide order of Catholic Sisters. I've lived in the United States since 2002 and I am currently completing a dual master's degree in pastoral theology and social work in the Midwest. I am protecting my identity, not for myself, but for my loved ones in Iraq.

You invited me to speak to you about the reality on the ground for Iraqi Christians, as I will do. But I cannot speak of the Iraqi Christian reality outside the context of the whole of Iraq. It is safe to say, without a hint of exaggeration, that the trauma of war has imprinted itself on the bodies, minds, and spirits of every Iraqi citizen. We

are now a people – 26 million strong – whose identity has been forged more by death, grief, suffering, trauma and pain than by any creed or political ideology. This is the context for the persecution of Iraq's minorities, including the Christians. And whatever our political leanings or theories about the causes of this current persecution, the consequences are a grave threat to the very existence of one of the earliest post-resurrection communities of the disciples of Jesus in the world. It requires the urgent attention of this Congress and the commitment of the international community.

The year 2010 was the most violent for Christians since the war began. Minorities are paying a heavy price because they don't have militias to protect them. Qaraqosh is a Christian village 36 kilometers from Mosul. The parishes of the village had been providing transportation to the students to go to Mosul University. The buses have been attacked multiple times in the past five years. One day there was a bomb stuck to the bottom of one of the buses. When the driver started the engine the bomb exploded and two female students' legs were amputated by the blast. Three others were wounded. Another time a bus was stopped by terrorists and seven young men were kidnapped. The terrorists demanded ransom from the families of the students in order to get their sons back. Despite this, the students kept going to the university.

Then, on May 2 last year, four buses filled with Christian students and teachers were attacked on their way to the university by terrorists using a well-coordinated series of car bombs, roadside IEDs, and weapons fire. The four buses were damaged very badly, and 144 students were injured. About 35 of them, beautiful young women and handsome young men, suffered severe facial disfigurement. One student, 19 year old Sandy, a first year biology major, lay in critical condition in a coma for a week before she died. A medical professional I know works at the hospital where many of the wounded were taken. In the hours after the bombing he returned home twice for a complete change of clothing, so blood-soaked he became while tending to the wounded.

According to witnesses, my cousin among them, when the buses were attacked the students ran from them, looking for help. They found more terror instead, as the perpetrators opened fire on them. My cousin's friends were covered with blood as the bullets sheared off ears, eyes, fingers and legs. She said the victims relied on the kindness of villagers from a Muslim farming community who unloaded their animals from their pick up trucks and transported the students to the closest hospital in dung-crusted flatbeds. "We were sitting on very dirty trucks filled with animal's manure, but we appreciated their help," my cousin told me.

After the attack, the Christian students were threatened by the terrorists who said that the men would be killed and the women would be kidnapped and given to Muslim men to marry. As a result, nearly all Christian students from the villages of Nineveh plain, my cousin among them, stopped going to the university. They stay at home in the villages, where there is no opportunity for higher education or meaningful employment. The religious, priests, and very active groups of lay people work hard in the villages to try to provide activities and education to keep the youth from focusing on the difficulty of their situation. But what will become of them?

There are those who think that creating an autonomous zone for Christians is the answer to the violence. It is possible that they are right. I can't say I know better. But for how long can the Christians live in a closed enclave and continue to be effective contributors to the whole of Iraqi society? This short term, and, to my way of thinking, short-sighted solution will only create more grief and difficulty further down the line because it does not address the root cause of the violence and persecution.

I have returned home to Iraq twice since the invasion. Each time the questions I faced regarding U.S. policy in Iraq have left me speechless, without words to defend this country whose citizens I have come to admire and love as if they were my own.

The Iraqi Christian community has been very patient, working toward and hoping for that new Iraq that would provide the peaceful and secure environment we need to live happy, productive and useful lives in our homeland. Yet year after year our situation has deteriorated. People cannot live healthy, productive lives under this kind of pressure. One of our sisters who works in one of our hospitals in Iraq said she's noticed an increase in the number of women asking for C-sections, not for any medical reason, but because they long for the peace they believe they will experience under anesthesia.

My own uncle says when he leaves his home to go to work, he says Good bye to his family because he doesn't know if he will ever see them again.

Did the parishioners who died while attending Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance in Baghdad on October 31, 2010, have any sense that they would never see their families again? Members of my own family and the relatives and friends of so many of my religious sisters and brothers, died that day. My cousin and her 13 month-old daughter survived the massacre but her husband and her brother-in-law were killed. When the terrorists entered the church Father Thear tried to talk with them, and asked them not to hurt the worshippers. Without saying a word they killed him. Then Fr. Waseem tried to do the same and they killed him. Survivors of the massacre said that after killing the two priests the terrorists started killing all the men in the church. The terrorist shouted at

them “Atheists!” and “You are going to Hell.” Some people were able to hide in the sacristy, which saved their lives. But at least 54 people were killed, among them the two priests, children in the womb, and a six month old girl, who was, according to witnesses, slaughtered on the altar.

Adam, three years old, saw his father killed in front of him. His aunts who were also in the church witnessed Adam crying out to the terrorists for three hours, “ Enough! Enough! Enough!” until the terrorists killed Adam, too.

My cousin saved her baby by placing her in a cabinet in the room, giving her food, and closing the door. She was worried about whether her daughter would get enough air in there, but it was only way that she knew to protect her. When I spoke with her a few days after the massacre she said that the day after the massacre her daughter woke up crying, looking for her daddy. What will she tell her daughter as she grows into the realization of why Daddy is not with her any more?

Iraqis and Americans can unite our voices with three year old Adam and cry “Enough, Enough!, Enough!” If we, like Adam, had cried out together long ago, with love and respect for the dignity of each person, thousands – hundreds of thousands of people would live today.

You brought me here today to tell my people’s story. Perhaps even now it is difficult for you to grasp the real sense of the words I speak. Does it all seem remote from your everyday experience? Perhaps not, if you have a loved one serving in the U.S. military in Iraq or Afghanistan. Perhaps not, if you recall what happened in Tucson 12 days ago. The terror, confusion, suffering, grief and pain that the people of Tucson experienced – and that you experienced, as you awaited word of your colleague Representative Giffords – is a glimpse at the experience of every Iraqi, whether they live in Iraq, or are counted among the 50,000 or so Iraqi refugees that have arrived in the U.S. since 2008. Or among the 90,000 or so Iraqi-Americans who were either born in the U.S. or emigrated here before the current refugee crisis. Yes, there may be 8,000 miles separating our geography, but the hearts of Americans and the hearts of Iraqis are much closer together than that. Americans – U.S. citizens or those on the path to citizenship – are the brothers and sisters, children and parents, grandchildren and the grandparents, the aunts and uncles and cousins of those who are dying everyday in Iraq. What is the cost of this violence?

It is my hope that greater minds than mine are working on this very question. It is my hope that your invitation to me to be here today shows we can not do this alone. The people of Iraq need the U.S. to fulfill its moral obligation to help repair the damage that the war has caused. And we need a stable, secure home, where we can begin to heal the wounds of trauma that are the most intimate, painful, and destructive consequences of this disastrous conflict.

My Iraqi religious community ministers among the remnant of Iraq’s Christians. We continue to believe that there is reason to hope for a better future for the country. In spite of all, we find hope, most often, when situations seem the most hopeless.

As difficult and painful as the situation is in Iraq, now is not the time to stop hoping. This meeting here today encourages me. And so do the many stories I hear from relatives, friends and my religious sisters in Iraq, and from the Iraqi refugees with whom I am working in the Midwest. The story isn’t over yet.

On his first day at work in an urban grocery store, one of my clients was apprehensive as he was quizzed by a curious co-worker, who wanted to know where he was from and whether his family was with him. “Iraq,” he answered, and “no, not all of my family is with me.” Then don’t worry, the co-worker said, “We will be your family in America.” Astonished, the refugee said “His soldiers are dying in my country, and he can say that to me? I want always to work in this grocery store.”

In this most recent violence against Christians in Iraq, a dear friend of mine fled his house in Mosul for the safer villages in the north. Before he left, he entrusted his house key to his Muslim neighbor, who looks in on the house and calls him regularly to update him on the situation. In one of these calls his neighbor told my friend, “Come back. The neighborhood does not feel as safe to us as it did when you were here. We hope you will come back.”

Can Iraq be again what it once was? Can it be even better? Can it be a place where Iraqis live together as neighbors across the garden wall, across the artificial boundaries drawn by politicians and challenged by terrorists, across the ideological, political and religious divides that are used by the powerful to keep us apart for their own benefit?

These are questions that can only be answered by Iraqis and Americans together. Are you willing to try? Are you willing to not give up? Are you willing to realize that the United States needs to be liberated from the violence and trauma of this war as much as Iraqis do? Then please, consider carefully the recommendations that have been put before you, some of which I’ve enumerated here. The litmus test for their worthiness should always be the protection of Iraq’s religious minorities and the effectiveness of the proposed solution as a step toward integrating fully into Iraqi society people of all races, creeds and ethnicities. Mere tolerance is not enough. Iraq and

the United States can say together, "Mission accomplished," when all of Iraq's citizens feel safe following the example of my Christian friend in Mosul and his Muslim neighbor. Can we learn, once again, to entrust each other with our house keys?

Thank you.

Recommendations:

1. The US Government should continue to work with the Government of Iraq to ensure that it says and does all that it can to protect religious minorities in Iraq.
2. The US should continue resettlement as an option for Iraqi refugees, with particular attention to Iraqi religious minorities, and should consider using unallocated refugee slots for this population during the current fiscal year;
3. The US should consider a P-2 designation for Iraqi religious minorities (a group of special interest) so that individual Iraqis can apply directly to the US for resettlement (instead of having to go through UNHCR);
4. The US should consider establishing safe houses in countries of first asylum where there are vulnerable Iraqi refugees, especially women and children at risk of trafficking;
5. Security clearances for Iraqi refugees already approved for resettlement should be expedited so Iraqi families do not languish for months or years in countries of first asylum.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you very much for your testimony.

SISTER RITA. Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. The next witness will be Dina Guirguis.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for organizing this timely hearing. Members of the Commission, I am especially pleased to have the opportunity to give testimony on Egypt's -- I won't say sectarian problem; it's really become a full-fledged crisis at this point. And I think I speak on behalf of the entire Coptic community in thanking you, Mr. Wolf specifically, for your heroic efforts on behalf of religious freedom in Egypt.

"2010 is over. I had the most wonderful days of my life in 2010, and I wish 2011 will be even better. I have so many wishes for 2011. Lord, stand by me and help me achieve them." Mariam Fekri, a girl of 22, wrote these words on Facebook a few hours before she was killed in a brutal attack on the Saints' Church in Alexandria Egypt that left at least 25 people killed, and dozens injured.

Mariam's hopes and ultimate fate so tragically and poignantly illustrate the plight of the Coptic people, Egypt's native Christians, who represent 10 to 15 percent of Egypt's 83 million people. They are the Middle East's largest Christian minority, but in the past decade have faced an alarming escalation of violence, as state protection has dwindled.

For at least three decades, we, the Copts, have been offered an authoritarian compact of sorts. The Copts, as all Egyptians, were to live under a draconian emergency law, namely martial law, suspending basic constitutional protections in exchange for the delivery of stability and protection from terrorism.

In those three decades, however, Egypt has failed to make adequate progress on key developmental indicators. Today, 42 percent of Egyptians survive on less than two dollars a day. Thirty percent are illiterate, and Egypt ranks dismally on corruption indices.

Egypt's human rights record fares no better. Freedom House consistently classifies Egypt as not free, and Egypt's record on religious freedom has gone from bad to worse, earning it a ranking of fifth, five, among the worst countries of the world last year by the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life, in the company of nations such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China.

Egypt's constitution guarantees equal citizenship and protection from discrimination on the basis of religion, and yet the state itself has institutionalized the worst forms of discrimination, and permitted the growth of a culture of sectarianism and impunity to act on that



sectarianism. A Cairo-based human rights organization has described Egypt recently as, quote, "a police state infused increasingly with theocratic elements," end quote.

While mosques have nearly no restrictions on their construction, the building and repair of churches is legally subject to an antiquated law, dating back to Ottoman times, requiring a presidential decree. For the last decade, the scope and geographic reach of sectarian violence has multiplied, often with the direct involvement and incitement of the Egyptian state security apparatus, as well as other state authorities and symbols.

In 2008, for instance, an ancient Greek Orthodox Church was marched on and eventually destroyed by some 40 people, led by a judge and his two sons, who were chief prosecutors at the time. Similarly, state institutions are absent when sectarian violence breaks out, and the judicial system affords no relief to Christian victims of Muslim violence.

At least half a dozen murders of Christians by Muslims in the last four years were rendered crimes without punishment, due to the refusal of the state to follow the requirements of the rule of law. Instead, and in a typical band-aid remedy that avoids addressing the root causes of the violence, the state offers the, quote, "security solution," in the form of the intervention of the Ministry of Interior, aimed at limited pacification.

This can take the form of force reconciliation sessions, which we've heard alluded to previously today, where victims and perpetrators -- and I'll talk a little bit about what the details of these reconciliation sessions consist of, if you don't mind.

Victims and perpetrators are brought together and coerced by the security establishment to relinquish their rights to legal remedies. This can range from forcing victims to sign affidavits relinquishing the right to criminal prosecution, to relinquishing the right to compensation for the destruction of personal property, a feature often accompanying sectarian violence in Egypt.

Both of these pressure tactics are blatantly illegal. Shamefully, and in complete disregard for the rule of law, the public prosecutor's office is often complicit in aiding these blatantly illegal tactics, despite its mandate to promptly investigate every incident and bring perpetrators to justice.

The public prosecutor does this by accepting improper arrests and detentions referred to it by the security establishment, and/or by refusing to properly investigate certain crimes, ensuring that the perpetrators evade accountability, either by not being identified or at trial, when insufficient evidence is produced.

The state's consistent denial of the fair application of the rule of law manifests in its continued preference of reconciliation in lieu of prosecution -- not in addition to prosecution, but simply in lieu of prosecution -- as well as its blatant siding with the perpetrators of sectarian violence, results in the alienation of the Copts in their own land, and in the polarization of Egyptian society.

Further, the message from the Egyptian state via its security apparatus solution is clear. Sectarian violence is a crime to be committed with impunity. In severely limiting even the ability of Christians to repair existing churches, the state similarly sends a message to Muslims that Christians are to be legitimately denied their basic right to worship.

Restrictions on freedom of worship is a main cause of sectarian tension in Egypt, accounting for nearly 30 percent of incidents of sectarian violence. And cases where Christians were attacked simply because they sought to worship, even privately in their own homes, abound. Christians are bizarrely, for example, brought in by security on charges of conducting prayer inside their homes, quote "without a permit."

In upper Egypt's Asyt governorate, affixing a wooden cross at the entrance of a church required the intervention of the Assistant Minister of Interior for the governorate, who requested that the cross be removed because it, quote, "provokes Muslims."

Even though the Egyptian penal code provides special protection through Article 160 for houses of worship from destruction or vandalism, not a single known case of destruction or vandalism of a church has been prosecuted under this article, despite dozens and dozens of documented incidents.

In fact, the vast majority of incidents of sectarian violence that have occurred in the last three years have never even gone to trial. All of these incidents, and dozens more, and their circumstances, were documented by local human rights organizations.

Meanwhile, there exists no real political will on the part of the regime to address the root causes of the violence, starting with addressing basic tenets of freedom of religion. A law addressing the ability of Christians to build churches has been proposed in Parliament for over a decade, and remains ignored even after the Alexandria massacre.

In fact, in the days following the massacre, a member of the Shura Council, Egypt's upper house of Parliament, proposed that the government immediately ratify the law easing the construction of churches. In return, he was accused by the Minister of Parliamentary affairs of, quote, "inciting sectarian divisions."

Moreover, despite the Copts' large numbers, they are largely excluded from government institutions both local and national, starting from Parliament, where the country's ruling party, the National Democratic Party, nominated only 10 Copts out of its 800 candidates in the last parliamentary election in November to December of 2010.

Copts are largely excluded from prominent positions in the country's security apparatus, and from leadership positions in public universities. Six hundred years of Coptic history is by and large absent from educational curricula in public schools, and Copts are similarly under -- or poorly represented in the state owned media. Incitement against Christians in the media and in government controlled mosques is tolerated. Conversions to Christianity are fraught with complications, and often entail prison time or serious harassment by state authorities, while conversions to Islam are by and large encouraged.

Starting with denying citizens equal treatment, suspending the rule of law, and culminating with the brutal emergency law that's been in place for almost 30 years now, since Mubarak took power, the Egyptian regime is fully responsible for creating the fertile ground on which pernicious and egregious sectarian violence has become routine.

In an effort to outbid Islamists, who constitute the strongest organized opposition to Mubarak's 30 year iron rule, the Egyptian regime has indulged an unhealthy obsession to compete on religious grounds, mistakenly believing that oppressing one segment of the population at the expense of another will somehow earn it legitimacy from the Muslim majority, and create a scapegoat to deflect from its own substantial governance failures.

The regime cynically uses the Copts. While allowing the worst forms of discrimination against them, it simultaneously attempts to show itself as their defender, realizing they have nowhere else to go, and unleashing the official media to designate them as traitors if they even dare to appeal their cause internationally.

Even now, as we are reaping the consequences of the regime's systematic discriminatory policies in the form of a fully fledged sectarian crisis -- and make no mistake, it is a crisis, and worsening -- and terrorism threatening the region and the international community, the Egyptian regime refuses to alter its policies.

The Egyptian government refused, for example, the offer of assistance which DAS Wittes referred to earlier today, the offer of assistance from the United States government to investigate the New Year's Eve bombing, and is instead insisting on its failed security solutions. So, for example, in response to the bombing, the regime is now collectively rounding up and punishing large groups of Muslims, and it's been reported that they've tortured somebody to the point of death, thereby ensuring that sectarian tensions erupt beyond the shameful low point that they are currently in.

It is my sincere hope that 22 year old Mariam, along with a number of now-orphaned children, will not have died in vain. And yet the state's response with more brutality and force, the same formula that has failed to deliver stability or security for the past three decades, bodes greater violence in the coming days.

Knowing that the real answer to Egypt's sectarian crisis is progress towards a democratic state that respects human rights, applies the rule of law, and extends equal constitutional protections to all of its citizens, the Egyptian regime will avoid doing so at all cost. Instead, it will -- as it has already begun to -- respond in typical appeasement fashion, with empty rhetoric about national unity, promises, and perhaps some cosmetic changes, while ultimately retaining the status quo.

More alarmingly, as we approach a presidential election this fall that may witness Egypt's first presidential transition in 30 years, the regime may well encourage the growth and influence of hard-line Islamic Salafist movements, as it has in the past, in order to counter its largest opposition group, the relatively more modern Muslim Brotherhood.

The regime is known for its manipulative tactics in this regard, without much long term consideration of the potential irreversible resulting damage, not only to Egypt's Copts and religious minorities, but to Egypt as a nation, its role as U.S. ally, and key regional player.

And with that I would close, and I would just like to thank the Chairman for raising and pressing the issue of the special envoy, which I have raised in previous writings. And I would be happy to address that in any questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Guirguis follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DINA GUIRGUIS, KESTON FAMILY RESEARCH FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Good morning. Thank you Mr. Chairman for organizing this timely hearing. I'm especially pleased to have the opportunity to give testimony on Egypt's sectarian problem.

"2010 is over... I had the most wonderful days of my life in 2010, and I wish 2011 will be even better, I have so many wishes for 2011.. Lord, stand by me and help me achieve them". Mariam Fekry, a girl of 22, wrote those words on Facebook a few hours before she was killed in a brutal attack on the Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt, on New Year's Eve that left at least 25 people killed and dozens injured. Mariam's hopes, and ultimate fate, so tragically and poignantly illustrate the plight of the Coptic people, Egypt's native Christians, who represent 10-15% of Egypt's 83 million people. They are the Middle East's largest Christian minority but in the past decade have faced an alarming escalation of violence as state protection has dwindled.

For at least three decades, we, the Copts, have been offered an authoritarian compact of sorts. The Copts, as all Egyptians, were to live under a draconian emergency law, namely martial law suspending basic constitutional protections, in exchange for the delivery of stability and protection from terrorism. In those three decades, however, Egypt failed to make adequate progress on key developmental indicators; today, 42% of Egyptians survive on less than \$2/day, 30% are illiterate, and Egypt ranks 111<sup>th</sup> on transparency indicators, demonstrating a critically high degree of corruption. Egypt's human rights record fares no better: Freedom House consistently classifies Egypt as "not free," and Egypt's record on religious freedom has gone from bad to worse, earning it a ranking of fifth among the worst countries of the world last year by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, in the company of nations such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China, and placing it on the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's

“watch list” since 2002, for “serious problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities.”

Egypt’s constitution guarantees equal citizenship and protection from discrimination on the basis of religion, and yet the state itself has institutionalized discrimination and permitted the growth of a culture of sectarianism and impunity to act on that sectarianism. A Cairo based human rights organization has described Egypt as a “police state infused increasingly with theocratic elements.” While mosques have nearly no restrictions on their construction, the building and repair of churches is legally subject to an antiquated law dating back to Ottoman times requiring a presidential decree. In 2005, presidential decree 391 was passed, requiring only the notification of authorities for church renovations. Despite this technical mitigation of the draconian law, the decree’s implementation has been dismal. Meanwhile, the scope and geographic reach of sectarian violence has multiplied, often with the direct involvement and incitement of the Egyptian state security apparatus as well as other state authorities and symbols. In 2008 for instance, an ancient Greek Orthodox Church was destroyed by some 40 people--led by a judge and his two sons--who were chief prosecutors at the time.

Similarly, state institutions are absent when sectarian violence breaks out—and the judicial system affords no relief to Christian victims of Muslim violence. At least half a dozen murders of Christians by Muslims in the last 4 years were rendered crimes without punishment due to the refusal of the state to follow the requirements of the rule of law in prosecuting felonies. Instead, and in a typical band aid remedy that avoids addressing the root causes of the violence, the state offers the “security” solution in the form of the intervention of the Ministry of Interior, aimed at limited pacification. This can take the form of forced “reconciliation sessions,” where victims and perpetrators are brought together and coerced by the security establishment to relinquish their rights to legal remedies, ranging from signing affidavits relinquishing the right to criminal prosecution to relinquishing the right to compensation for the destruction of personal property, a prominent feature often accompanying sectarian attacks in Egypt. Security often uses the aid of local religious figures in bringing about such grudging reconciliations, and when this fails, the security establishment sometimes carries out collective punishment against a community. They do this by making sweeping arrests of members of a certain community and holding them “hostage,” as a coercive tactic to force their desired outcome--and often make no distinction between perpetrator and victim in so doing. (In startling demonstrations of the security apparatus’ inability and unwillingness to protect victims, security goes so far so as to forcefully displace victims of sectarian violence, as occurred multiple times in 2009 for example when a Christian priest and his family were expelled from the Fashin District of Beni Soueif in Upper Egypt after violence erupted there, and again in the Sohag governorate when security forcibly removed five Baha’i families from their homes after some Muslim villagers burned the homes of Baha’is.) Shamefully, and in complete disregard for the rule of law, the Public Prosecutor’s office is often complicit in aiding these blatantly illegal tactics, despite its mandate to promptly investigate every incident and bring perpetrators to justice. The Public Prosecutor does this by accepting improper arrests and detentions referred by the security establishment, and/or by refusing to properly investigate certain crimes, ensuring that the perpetrators evade accountability either by not being identified or at trial when insufficient evidence is produced.

The state’s consistent denial of the fair application of the rule of law, manifest in preference of reconciliation in lieu of prosecution, as well as its blatant siding with the perpetrators of sectarian violence results in the alienation of the Copts in their own land and in the polarization of Egyptian society. Further, the message from the Egyptian state via its security “solution” is clear: sectarian violence is a crime to be committed with impunity. In severely limiting even the ability of Christians to repair existing churches, the state similarly sends a message to Muslims that Christians are to be legitimately denied their basic right to worship. Christians being denied their ability to freely worship is a main cause of sectarian tension in Egypt—accounting for nearly 30% of incidents of violence--and the cases where Christians were attacked simply because they sought to worship—even privately in their homes—abound. (Examples began with mob attacks by Muslims perceiving a personal affront from Christians building churches, driven in large part by the state’s denial of permits to even build social halls to host weddings and funerals. This was pathetically demonstrated in 2009 when security agencies prevented Copts in the October governorate from praying over the body of a deceased Christian woman in a building owned by the bishopric for fear it would be converted into a church.) Additionally, Christians are bizarrely brought in by security on charges of conducting prayer inside their homes “without a permit.” In Upper Egypt’s Assiut governorate, affixing a wooden cross at the entrance of a church required the intervention of the assistant minister of interior of the governorate, who requested the cross be removed because it “provokes Muslims.” Even though the Egyptian penal code provides special protection, through Article 160, for houses of worship from destruction or vandalism, not a single known case of destruction or vandalism of a church has been prosecuted under this article, despite dozens of documented incidents. In fact, the vast majority of incidents of sectarian violence that have occurred in the last three years have never gone to trial. All of these incidents, and dozens more, and their circumstances were documented by the

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and other local human rights organizations. The incidents are emblematic of the systemic and deeply sectarian mindset that has taken Egyptians hostage, including those charged with enforcing the law and protecting all citizens equally.

Meanwhile, there exists no real political will on the part of the regime to address the root causes of this violence, starting with addressing basic tenets of freedom of religion. A law addressing the ability of Christians to build churches has been proposed in parliament for over a decade and remains ignored, even after the Alexandria massacre. In fact, in the days following the massacre, a member of the Shura Council, Egypt's Upper house of parliament, proposed that the Egyptian government immediately ratify the law easing the construction of houses of worship; in return he was accused by Minister of Parliamentary Affairs (Mofid Shehab) of "inciting sectarian divisions."

Moreover, despite the Copts' large numbers, they are largely excluded from government institutions, both local and national, starting from parliament where the country's ruling party, the National Democratic Party, nominated only 10 Copts out of its 800 candidates in the last parliamentary election in November 2010. Copts are largely excluded from prominent positions in the country's security apparatus, and from leadership positions in public universities. Six hundred years of Coptic history is by and large absent from educational curricula in public schools, and Copts are similarly under, or poorly, represented in state owned media. Incitement against Christians in the media and in government controlled mosques is tolerated. Conversions to Christianity are fraught with complications and often entail prison time or serious harassment by state authorities, while conversions to Islam are by and large encouraged.

Starting with denying citizens equal treatment, suspending the rule of law, and culminating with a brutal emergency law, the Egyptian regime is fully responsible for creating the fertile ground on which pernicious and egregious sectarian violence has become routine. In an effort to "outbid Islamists," who constitute the strongest organized opposition to Mubarak's 30 year iron rule, the Egyptian regime has indulged an unhealthy obsession to compete on religious grounds, mistakenly believing that oppressing one segment of the Egyptian population at the expense of another will somehow earn it legitimacy from the Muslim majority and create a scapegoat to deflect from its substantial governance failures. The regime cynically uses the Copts; while allowing the worst forms of discrimination against them, it simultaneously attempts to show itself as their defender, realizing they have nowhere else to go and unleashing the official media to designate them as traitors if they even dare to appeal their cause internationally.

Even now, as we are reaping the consequences of the regime's systematic discriminatory policies in the form of a full fledged sectarian crisis—and terrorism threatening the region and the international community—the Egyptian regime refuses to alter its policies. The Egyptian government refused for example the offer of assistance from the United States Government to investigate the New Year's Eve bombing and is instead insisting on its failed security solutions. In response to the bombing, the regime is now collectively rounding up and punishing large groups of Muslims, ensuring that sectarian tensions and mistrust erupt beyond the shameful low point they are currently in.

It is my sincere hope that 22 year old Mariam, along with a number of now orphaned children, will not have died in vain. And yet the state's response with more brutality and force—the same formula that has failed to deliver stability or security for the past three decades - bodes greater violence and misfortune in the coming days.

Knowing that the real answer to Egypt's sectarian crisis is progress toward a democratic state that respects human rights, applies the rule of law and extends equal constitutional protections to all citizens, the Egyptian regime will avoid doing so at all costs. Instead, it will as it has already begun to respond in typical appeasement fashion, with empty rhetoric about national unity and promises and perhaps some cosmetic changes while ultimately retaining the status quo. More alarmingly, as we approach a presidential election in the fall of 2011 that may witness Egypt's first presidential transition in thirty years, the regime may well encourage the growth and influence of hard-line Salafist movements in order to counter its largest opposition group, the relatively more moderate Muslim Brotherhood. The regime is known for its divide and conquer strategies and manipulative tactics in this regard, without much long-term consideration of the potential irreversible resulting damage, not only to Egypt's Copts and religious minorities, but to Egypt as a nation, its role as US ally and key regional player.

SIGN OFF – THANK YOU.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Ms. Dunne?

Ms. DUNNE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the honor of addressing this commission. I'm going to concentrate on Egypt as well in my remark, but I think that Ms. Guirguis and Ms. Shea have really said a lot of the -- laid out a lot of the important facts of the Egyptian situation. I'd like to just raise a few additional points, and request that my full testimony be submitted to the record.

Mr. WOLF. Sure. Without objection, your full testimony will be.

Ms. DUNNE. Yes. Thank you. I think that, when we look at this escalation of attacks on Christians in Egypt, it's very clear that there's something very serious going on. The January 1st church bombing, this January 11th shooting attack, and so forth.

I don't think the Egyptian government bears direct responsibilities for these events, and I don't think Egyptian officials would have ever wanted such tragedies to occur. Still, I do agree that the Egyptian government has badly mishandled the sectarian issue for many years, and I hope that these attacks will serve as a wake-up call for Egyptian leaders.

It's time for them to end the serious and persistent discrimination against Christians and other non-Muslims that exists in Egyptian law and Egyptian practice, and to find more effective ways of addressing escalating tensions between Muslims and Christians, including bringing the perpetrators of these attacks to justice and allowing all the information from the investigations to come to light, so that people can know what really happened.

Now, while the Egyptian government doesn't actively persecute Christians, there is a prejudicial legal framework in Egypt. And this has created a permissive environment that allows Egyptian officials and private individuals to discriminate against Christians freely and with impunity. And we've already heard today about some of the aspects of that prejudicial legal environment: the requirement to list religion on national identity cards, the inequality in practices surrounding religious conversion -- as we know, Christians may freely change their religious affiliations to Muslims, for example, but Muslims may not change theirs to Christian or any other religion -- and the different laws and practices surrounding construction of places of worship.

Ms. Guirguis also spoke about Christians being woefully under-represented in government positions. She mentioned, for example, in elected office, whether in the Parliament, where Christians now hold only two percent of the seats in the assembly, and that's replicated very much in local and regional governments.

Likewise, Christians are nearly invisible in the senior ranks of the armed forces, the internal security forces. And I would note that, for example, in Egypt provincial governors are appointed by President Mubarak, not elected. And among 28 provincial governors, President Mubarak has appointed one Christian only.

Perhaps one of the most serious and directly relevant aspects of this, which has already been mentioned, is this failure to bring to justice those who have committed violence against Christians in recent years. Congressman Pitts mentioned the al-Kosheh attacks. That's how the last decade started, with the killings of 21 Christians and one Muslim in January 2000, and nobody has ever been convicted of the killing of those Christians.

You know, we've seen recently, a year ago, the Nag Hammadi shootings, and just now we see one verdict coming forward. It's very, very typical that these trials get stretched out for a very long time. Investigations, in many cases, are mishandled. And there's a general impression that authorities just want to put these cases behind them as quickly as possible.

In fact, I would say there's a general approach or tendency of the Egyptian government to treat sectarian issues less as a threat to the security of Egyptian citizens, and more as a threat to

the security of the government from its citizens. So they just want to put sectarian issues aside, because they're fearful of the destabilizing effect. But unfortunately, that does not lead to any kind of effective approaches to the underlying causes.

Egyptian authorities' routine reactions to sectarian incidences are to say that national unity -- this is the slogan: "National unity is intact. National unity cannot be threatened." Even to say that Christians are not a minority. Unfortunately, these slogans really serve to deny the problems rather than to acknowledge them, and to end discussion of these issues rather than begin discussion in any serious way.

Now, as Ms. Guirguis mentioned, there has been some discussion of some steps, perhaps, to discuss a new law on regulations for construction of Christian religious places, or perhaps to unify regulations on places of worship, construction of all places of worship. It remains to be seen, though -- very much, I think -- whether there will be any action on this once the current crisis, the outrage over the recent bombing, dies down.

The Egyptian government really could do much more. For example, to task members of the Egyptian Parliament, for example, with recommending pieces of legislation that need to be passed or need to be revised in order to remove the discrimination that exists in law.

I just want to end by pointing out that the discrimination against Christians and sectarian violence in Egypt is part of a much broader pattern in Egypt of human rights abuses, and of a failure on the part of the Egyptian government to address issues that are important to Egyptian society.

The rights of Christians in Egypt ultimately are linked to broader questions about what the rights of all Egyptian citizens are or should be. And unfortunately, I think that discrimination against Christians and sectarian tensions are likely to persist until we see a new approach on the part of the government of Egypt, and improvement in the human, civil, and political rights of all Egyptians. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Dunne follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHELE DUNNE, SENIOR ASSOCIATE, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the honor of addressing this Commission.

Let me begin by expressing my condolences to the families of the victims of the January church bombing and January 11 shooting attack in Egypt, and my hope that the Egyptian government will soon bring the perpetrators to justice. We still do not know for certain whether terrorist groups outside Egypt were involved in the January 1 bombing; certainly al-Qaeda groups were fanning the flames of sectarian tension in Egypt specifically for the past few months and encouraging attacks.

That being said, these attacks took place within a specific social, political, and religious context inside Egypt. Perhaps they were carried out by terrorists who sought to capitalize on those issues to create instability inside Egypt and perhaps they were carried out by Egyptians with local motivations and little or no real connection to al-Qaeda. In either case, these attacks cannot be viewed in isolation from the sectarian tensions that have been brewing in Egypt for years.

The Egyptian government does not bear direct responsibility for these events nor would Egyptian officials ever have wanted such tragedies to occur. Still, senior officials have hastened to attribute these horrific acts to external actors, while they have been quick to deny that internal sectarian tensions could be to blame. Whatever the identity of the perpetrators, these attacks and the widespread anti-government protests that followed them should serve as a wake-up call for Egyptian leaders. It is time for them to end the serious and persistent discrimination against non-Muslims that exists in Egyptian law and practice and to find more effective ways of addressing escalating tensions between Muslims and Christians.

### **A Pattern of Inequality**

While the Egyptian government does not actively persecute or repress Christians, a prejudicial legal framework has created a permissive environment that allows Egyptian officials and private individuals to discriminate against Christians freely and with impunity.

The requirement to list religion on national identity cards, the inequality in practices surrounding conversion (Christians may change their religious affiliation to Muslim, for example, but Muslims may not change theirs to Christian or any other religion), and the different laws and policies surrounding places of worship for various religions all create resentment among Christians, Baha'is, Shiites, and others who are not Sunni Muslims.

Moreover, Christians are severely underrepresented in government positions, whether appointed or elected. While Christians represent 8 to 15 percent of the Egyptian population, the only government institution in which they enjoy a similar presence is the cabinet, where there are three Christians among 32 ministers. There is only one Christian among Egypt's 28 provincial governors, very important positions appointed by President Hosni Mubarak. Likewise, Christians are nearly invisible in the senior ranks of the armed forces and internal security forces.

President Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) has adopted laudable theoretical positions on the equality of all citizens, in contrast to groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which hold that a Christian should not be eligible to be president. But the NDP nominated only ten Christians out of a total of more than 750 candidates for parliamentary elections in November 2010. In the end three of them won and Mubarak appointed seven others, leaving Christians holding only two percent of seats in the People's Assembly.

Perhaps the most serious and directly relevant aspect of Egyptian authorities' behavior has been the longstanding failure to bring to justice those who have committed violence against Christians. The last decade began with sectarian violence in the Upper Egyptian village of al- Kosh, in which 21 Christians and one Muslim were killed in January 2000; no one has ever been convicted of killing any of the Christians. A State Security court issued on January 16 the first verdict in the killing of seven Christians and one Muslim policeman in Naga Hammadi on Coptic Orthodox Christmas in January 2010, sentencing one of the perpetrators to death while two others await the conclusion of their trials. There is a sense among Egyptian Christians that justice for such crimes has been long delayed at best, and that in many cases investigations were mishandled and authorities were eager to put the incidents behind them.

The handling of such crimes is typical of the approach of Egyptian authorities, who tend to treat sectarian tensions less as a threat to the security of citizens and more as a threat to the security of the state from its citizens. From this attitude springs an approach to sectarian tensions that is light on justice but heavy on brutality, as seen in the death of al-Said Bilal, a young Alexandria man who turned up dead within 24 hours of being detained for questioning in the January 1 bombing.

### **Moving Beyond Denial**

Treating sectarianism as a regime security problem rather than as a deeply rooted social phenomenon has prevented the Egyptian government from effectively addressing the underlying causes of animosity and discrimination. Egyptian authorities' protestations that "national unity" is intact and that "the Christians are not a minority" until now have functioned to deny rather than acknowledge problems and to end rather than begin serious discussion of them.

There are some signs of possible positive steps; for example, the NDP reportedly is drafting a new law to unify regulations governing construction of all places of worship, whether Muslim or Christian. It remains to be seen, however, whether such initiatives will continue once the outrage over the recent bombing subsides. One problem for the Egyptian government is that discussing sectarian issues will lead to broader questions about what the rights of all citizens are or should be. The 2009 Arab Human Development Report discussed this problem at length as it pertains to all Arab countries, concluding that "peaceful coexistence in multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian societies rests on evolved forms of citizenship."<sup>i</sup> In other words, discrimination against Christians and sectarian tensions are likely to persist until all Egyptian citizens enjoy enhanced human, civil, and political rights.

<sup>i</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2009*, p. 76.

Mr. WOLF. I want to thank all four of you. I think all four were very, very powerful, the testimony. And so I want to thank you. And all four testimonies will be fully in the record.

Since Mr. Smith is here, and Mr. Pitts, and they haven't had as much time, I'm just going to ask basically one question, and then go to Mr. Smith, and then Mr. Pitts. And I'm pleased, Nina, that you brought up the issue of Iraqi Christians who are outside the country, too.



And I think by asking this question, this person could involve themselves with those in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, as well. And I'd like to see your writings on that, and I appreciate your idea on that. I want to thank you. But if all four can answer the question: your viewpoint as to the American government having a person in Baghdad and a person in Cairo, specifically designated and responsible to advocating for Christians and minorities.

Because I do sense, particularly when I'm in Cairo, the American embassy just doesn't seem to really have that fervor to really deal with this issue. Second, the idea that Congressmen Smith and Mr. Pitts and I have talked about maybe putting into legislation -- or maybe doing a letter to the administration, but also putting in legislation, if they're reluctant -- and I believe it would go to Mr. Smith's new subcommittee -- to create a special issue for this issue, who could advocate for Christians and other minorities in the middle east, parallel to or comparable to Senator Mitchell with regard to the special envoy on the Arab/Israeli issue, similar to what John Danforth, Senator Danforth, did with regard to the Sudan issue.

So if all four of you could have a person in Baghdad or Cairo specifically, not somebody who's doing so many other things -- as I mentioned earlier, just before the Olympics in Beijing, Mr. Smith and I were there. They had one person in all of China dealing with human rights, and I think 15 or 17 commercial attaches, and more coming in for the Olympics. The embassy just didn't -- this was not their priority.

And the person who had this responsibility felt overwhelmed. I think the same thing could be true here, so we would want one person in Cairo, in Baghdad, on this particular issue. So maybe we can go in the order of the testimony, Nina, then Sister Rita, and so on. And then we'll go to Mr. Smith and Mr. Pitts.

Ms. SHEA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wholeheartedly support it. I think USCIRF would support it. It's along the lines of what we've been saying we wanted, a human rights envoy in Baghdad. For several years we've been saying that. One focused just on these minorities would be extremely important to advocate and report on what is happening, report back to here on the facts on the ground.

For years, our U.S. government has resisted even acknowledging that Christians were being targeted, or the other minorities who were being targeted. And now there's just a reluctance to even admit that there is this cleansing going on, with the goal to eliminate their presence entirely. And this is something that other European governments have already recognized and spoken out on.

President Sarkozy has. Other, Italian and Polish, governments have. But we have not, and our administration is still treating this as isolated events. There have been some who say that nothing can be done to help these people, that their being driven out is inevitable. I don't believe it. I don't think we've even begun to try.

And it's important to understand that the Christians in Egypt and Iraq are two of the three largest Christian communities in the middle east at this point, Lebanon being the third. And they are the largest communities of non-Muslims in the Arab middle east. So once they are driven out, there will be -- this will be the demise of religious diversity and pluralism in the middle east, which is bad for everyone concerned. There will be a polarization even worse than what we see today.

So anything that we can do to sharpen our message, to sharpen our understanding, and to help us calibrate the measures that are needed to protect and help them stay there is to be welcomed. Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you. If we could get a letter on those issues, that would carry a lot of weight as we move the legislation through the house. Sister Rita, your comments on a person in Baghdad who advocates for this issue, and a special envoy for the Middle East for this issue?

SISTER RITA. Yes. I say that it's very important. First of all, Iraq is our homeland. And as a Christian person, it's very important, I say, for a Christian to remain in Iraq. So there is a need for an advocate person, and also there is a need for -- to recognize that what is happening there is unjust, and the way the Christians are treated, and the way they are attacked is an inhumane way. So I say there is a need for a person.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you. Ms. Guirguis? And thank you for your thoughts. And anything you've written on it, we'd love to see it too.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Absolutely. I would be happy to send those materials along. I do very much like the idea of the special envoy for religious freedom or religious minorities in the middle east, and my original conception was similar to a George Mitchell position.

However, the person would be empowered to monitor the situation specifically of religious minorities, and to submit periodic reports to the President and to Congress on specific reforms, including Egypt's multilateral commitments with regard to the U.N. Universal Periodic Review. Some of those include recommendations on religious freedom, and Egypt has committed to making some of those changes.

So the idea is to have some sort of timetable to review reforms, and for that special designee to come back to the Hill and to the President, and to say "This is what's been accomplished. This is where we're advancing. This is where we're regressing." And based on that report, for there to be a serious discussion about potential sanctions or incentives.

And there is a substantial bilateral assistance package that is delivered to Cairo annually unconditioned, and that is something that ought to be considered when you consider the deteriorating situation of religious freedom as directly impacting Egypt's influence in the region, and its ability and role as a stable, moderate partner to the United States in promoting the interests of the United States in the region.

So I wholeheartedly support that idea. I agree with Ms. Shea that it helps sharpen the message of the United States. It helps demonstrate the focus and the value and the emphasis that is placed by the United States government on fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of religion.

With regards to the embassy, I do share your frustration regarding the embassy in Cairo. They seem to take a lot of what the regime says about the religious situation for granted, not push much further, even though that's essentially not their job.

And so I would very much also welcome the idea of somebody who would be empowered -- as the Congresswoman earlier today said -- from above to pursue their work independently, and to be supported from above as well. So I would be very, very pleased to see efforts to push for this special envoy, for this special designee at the embassies, and would be happy to help in any way that I can. Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. We would be glad to work with you to put that together. During the Reagan administration, it seemed the embassies were an island of freedom, and when you went to the American embassy in Romania, a Romanian dissident who came in felt they were at an island of freedom, that they would advocate.

I have never felt that the American embassy in Cairo was an island of freedom. It seems it was almost a -- so anyway, we'd be glad to do that. Ms. Dunne? And then I'll go to Mr. Smith.

Ms. DUNNE. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Regarding the idea of a position in Baghdad and Cairo -- in Cairo, for example, I know there's one officer in the embassy who does all human rights issues and civil society issues, as well as religious freedom. In fact, I myself held that position about 10 years ago.

Mr. WOLF. In Cairo?

Ms. DUNNE. In Cairo. And it's a very busy position. So I do think that breaking out the religious freedom issues would be -- and religious minorities issues -- would be a good idea. But I also want to agree with what Ms. Guirguis just said about the need for the instructions to come from Washington.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, very, very well, the Egyptian government is very, very sensitive to what they call outside interference, and very resistant to American interests in religious freedom and lifting religious discrimination in Egypt. So it's not surprising, I think, that the embassy in Cairo is quite timid on these issues, and doesn't want a lot of trouble with the host government.

So the only way they're going to be bolder on these issues, I think, is if the instructions come from Washington. And I think that, up till now, overall, the Obama administration has been quite slow in developing an approach on these issues. Two years have gone by, and we're just beginning to see a little bit more speaking out about human rights in general. And we really haven't seen it yet on religious freedom.

So I think that is one reason why the special envoy for religious freedom is a good idea. I mean, you need to have someone high-level back here who's generating, kind of, the agenda, and sending it out to the embassies. Because I think that's the only way you're going to see those embassies a lot more active.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you very much, all of you. Mr. Smith?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me say, I apologize for missing some of the earlier hearing. Speaker Boehner and I were at a press conference -- he invited me to it, and I couldn't say no -- on the introduction of a bill called the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act. And today's the day, so I had to be there for that. So I apologize for missing much of your testimonies, and the previous panels.

Let me just say a couple of things. I'm shocked, Ms. Dunne, when you say that they're a little slow -- or quite slow -- at the Obama administration on the human rights issue. You know, last night there was a state dinner feteing a man who began his rise in Chinese politics by his brutal crackdown in Tibet, when he oversaw the killing of nuns, Buddhist nuns, Buddhist monks, in Tibet.

And it was about three months before Tiananman Square, and there was an obligatory mention, not at last night's gathering, but at the press conference. And I am very concerned, because I know the President, when he traveled to Cairo, mentioned the Copts very obliquely, that human rights have been demoted in a very significant way in the last two years.

And it is appalling. Frank Wolf and I have been here for 31 years each. We have worked on human rights all over the world. Joe Pitts, almost that amount of time as well. Always working on religious freedom, human rights, wherever they are being abridged, wherever they are being violated. And this administration, frankly -- and hope springs eternal -- gets an F for their lack of responsiveness to the victims of human rights abuse. And my hope is that there will be a change of heart.

The envoy might be helpful. Will he listen to the envoy will be another question, but the hope is that an envoy would give us a greater probability of having significant success in that part of the world.

Let me just ask my first question to Sister Rita. You know, the situation for Christians under Saddam Hussein, if you could just speak to that, and whether or not the spilling of so much blood in trying to eradicate a dictatorship has unwittingly led to the spilling of Christians, now, and their blood, by way of these jihadists?

Was it worse or better under Hussein? And I've traveled to Baghdad, and both here in Washington and in the country have talked to persecuted Christians, including bishops and others. And they are -- they say that there is a reaction by security, U.S. and Iraqi security. Not a whole lot on the preventive side.

And from the political side, though, as has been said about Egypt by Ms. Guirguis -- I might be mispronouncing that -- there's been a lack of political will to really be seriously about eradicating the underlying systemic reasons why Christians are being attacked. Could you speak to that?

SISTER RITA. Yes. From my own experience, I will answer the question. Living in the north, Christians' experience under the old regime, under Saddam, was different than the Christian, probably, who lived in Baghdad. So I will speak from that experience, living in the north.

The situation was much better then, back in that time, in terms of persecution. To be honest, we didn't -- we have not experienced what we are experiencing today.

Mr. SMITH. I would say, Mr. Chairman, that that has to put an additional onus on each and every one of us, that they had a brutal dictator like Saddam Hussein, and the climate for Christians residing in Iraq was better. And I would hope that the administration, both in Baghdad and in Washington, the Obama administration, would realize that we have a moral imperative, and we have been lax and ineffective in ensuring that the Christians are protected, and other religious minorities.

So I thank you for your testimony. Let me ask Dina, if I can call you that instead of that name that I have problems pronouncing. You said that there exists no political will on the part of the regime to address the root cause of this violence. No relief in courts. You talked about reconciliation in lieu of prosecution. You pointed out that in the Shura, there were 10 Copts out of 800 candidates. And I'm wondering, were those Copts really men or women that really speak out boldly on behalf of Coptic issues?

You've mentioned that the conversion to Christianity is fraught with complications that entail prison, and I would ask -- and any of the panelists -- what kind of prison time are people who convert -- they and their families -- what kind of ill treatment are they subjected to? What is meted out to them? Have there been any killings of men or women who have converted to Christianity? So how much, how many in terms of conversions to Christianity from the Islamic faith?

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Thank you, Congressman. I appreciate the questions. Regarding the first question, about the Copts that are appointed, they tend to be appointed more than elected, simply because the sectarian climate doesn't allow for the free and willing election of a Copt by a majority Muslim country that has been swept up in sort of religious extremist fervor, if we may.

The Copts that are appointed, then, by the regime, I would have to say are probably not as independent as they could be. The regime vets them to make sure that they are sort of suitable

token representatives that do not genuinely speak for the horrors and the plight of the Christian population. And that sometimes may include members of the church hierarchy itself.

Lately, we've seen sort of an anger and reaction from the ordinary Coptic citizen against the church hierarchy, which has traditionally sought to pacify, sought to deal with the state in a way that would simply allow the Coptic population to get by.

And I think now that we've reached the point where anger is so strong, that the ordinary Coptic citizen is no longer willing to accept that, to accept being treated as a second-class citizen in exchange for the ability to live, to survive.

So that's the first question. With regards to the second, there is an apostasy law. Meaning that conversions from Islam would legally warrant death. I do not have the exact statistics on how many people have been meted out with the punishment of death for conversions, but the state security harassment is very severe.

Even in cases where the courts do legally recognize the conversion, the converts are met with all kinds of administrative obstacles, meaning that for example there will be an insistence on writing on the person's national ID card that they were formerly Muslim, in order to ensure that the person will continue to be discriminated against at every walk of life.

And so even --

Mr. SMITH. On that question, does that disproportionately impact women in a worse way, or is it equally hurtful of both men and women?

Ms. GUIRGUIS. I can't speak to that.

Mr. SMITH. Okay.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Where it does -- I think where we're seeing the most negative effects is in custody cases, where men that convert to Islam get automatic preference for custody of children, even minor children, even though that's in violation of Egyptian law.

Mr. SMITH. I appreciate that. When you talked about reconciliation in lieu of prosecution, does that mean that a person who murders a Coptic Christian is set free? I mean, is that actually what --

[Responses from audience.]

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Essentially --

Mr. SMITH. You don't have to answer that; everybody else did. That is outrageous.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Essentially, accountability is evaded in a number of ways.

Mr. SMITH. So that breeds impunity, obviously.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Absolutely. Absolutely. The prosecutors are -- state security jumps in, bypasses the rule of law. So all the legal procedures are bypassed, and security will jump in to go to the family of the victim and to say "Sign an affidavit saying that you forgive so and so for killing your son, that you are not insisting on bringing a criminal prosecution against this person."

And they make them sign that affidavit, even though that affidavit is illegal. I'm an attorney myself, and I -- I mean, I don't practice in Egypt, but you can imagine -- any normal person can imagine -- that this kind of affidavit, relinquishing the rights to a criminal prosecution in the case of a felony -- a murder, after all -- is on its face illegal, not to mention immoral, despicable, and unimaginable.

So this tends to be the trend. Sometimes there is a lot of public pressure that is brought to bear, such as in the case of the Nag Hammadi Christmas Eve shootings, and the state will be forced to prosecute.

And sometimes we see symbolic sentences meted out, one to two years. And that is only when public pressure is brought to bear. Generally speaking, the trend is for absolutely no accountability. That's the vast majority of cases.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask you, again honing in on that two percent of the Shura who happen to be Coptic Christians -- it has been my experience worldwide, but including in Egypt, that when you meet with parliamentarians, when you meet with heads of government, when you raise issues they often almost say "Oh, go talk to so and so, because he's the Coptic Christian and he'll give you the party line."

In 1994, I met with President Mubarak in Cairo, and raised Coptic Christian issues with him. And the same thing happened when I met with him here, with other members of Congress. And the same thing happened here. He would always say "Oh, talk to Boutros Ghali here," who is no longer, I understand, within the government.

And he would go on and on about how they are handling these issues, and I got the sense that we were being gamed, and being played for fools. And I'm very worried that many parliamentarians and many governments, including presidents, would meet with individuals like this and come away with "They've got that well under control."

And as you said, Ms. Dunne, the government doesn't really persecute, but if they allow the privatization of persecution, and to do so so that we have an impunity situation, which we believe -- I believe -- we have in Egypt, it's a distinction without a difference. You're letting the other people do the dirty work while the prosecutors stand back and facilitate the lack of rule of law.

So I just raise that as a -- I mean, hopefully people are getting on to that, including this administration. And Ms. Dunne, you know, you were there 10 years ago. Have things gotten worse or improved over the last decade, in your opinion?

Ms. DUNNE. In terms of the tension between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, it has definitely gotten worse. And I think that -- you know, Ms. Guirguis was just pointing this out. The Egyptian government has a way of treating these issues, violence and so forth, as just "This is just too hot to handle, so we cannot have a full and open discussion and discuss what might need to be done, whether it's through law, whether it's through the educational system, and so forth, to address these issues. What we must do is just sweep them under the carpet as quickly as possible."

That is their way of treating these things, and as we see, it's leading over time to just a snowballing of the problems.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask, with regard to the media -- and all of you might want to comment on that. The government obviously has tremendous influence over what gets into print and on television. And I've seen the anti-Coptic, but also the anti-Semitic media.

And it's awful. It is despicable. And I've actually raised that with President Mubarak, and I'm not the only one who's done that as well. And I'm wondering, has that gotten worse? Is there any way that that can be lessened or mitigated? Where is the responsibility, especially when the government has so much influence, to say "Cut it out. You're inciting hatred and killings."

And if any of you would like to touch on that? Yes, Nina.

Ms. SHEA. I would go further, and say it's inciting violence, really. And we're seeing this, an upsurge in this. The Commission has spoken out about it. Just before this hearing, in fact, one of those present today, Morris Sadek, who is a Coptic advocate with the National

American Coptic Assembly, showed me the front page of Rosa Weekly, which is a government outlet, from January 8th, with his photo alongside Osama bin Laden's.

And it creates this culture where Copts are viewed as a suspicious third column, not fully Egyptian. And their legal system as well -- I had a Coptic bishop speak at the Hudson Institute, where I work, two years ago. And he was talking about how Coptic language was restricted from being taught in schools, even though German and English and other languages are taught.

That talk was distorted, picked up by the government-controlled press in Egypt, distorted to make it sound as though he were advocating that Arabic be abolished and replaced with Coptic language, which is not what he was saying, and which is preposterous.

And he received over 200 death threats and could not return to Egypt for many months. And I know you all helped him to get back, eventually, but it's just -- the government does foment this. Government-controlled mosques and imams who are paid by the government also issue death threats against Copts when they speak up for human rights.

In September, Al-Jazeera hosted an Islamist, Dr. Salim al-Awwa, former Secretary General of the World Council of Muslim Scholars, who accused the Coptic Church of having its own militia and hiding weapons in the monasteries and churches, that we were preparing for war against the Muslims and dividing Egypt into two states.

And this kind of broadcast was then picked up -- and similar vilification was picked up -- within Egypt, by these government-sponsored outlets. This is very, very dangerous. This is more than just sweeping this under the carpet. The government is actually stoking this kind of violence and hatred.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask three final questions, if I could, Mr. Chairman? And I appreciate your grant of time. First, the Human Rights Council at the United Nations, which regrettably has an obsession with going after Israel, investigating as well as criticizing, but often to the detriment of where human rights abuses are flourishing unabated, like in Egypt.

And I'm wondering, since the Office of Islamic -- the conference actually controls that agenda, to a large extent -- what has the U.N. done, the council, or any other body of the United Nations, with regards to the Coptic Christians in Egypt?

When Egypt was subjected to its periodic review, what was the outcome? Perhaps Dina, do you want to speak to that?

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Congressman, first of all, very perceptive of you to note that the Copts within the government do toe the party line. Just keep that in mind, and I'm glad that this is being announced publically. Because you will see rounds and rounds of Copts, especially after every major incident, come through town here and pacify you, and tell you that everything's great, national harmony, et cetera, et cetera.

Just all sentiments which are frankly offensive to those of us that actually follow the situation and have relatives and friends still in Egypt. With regards to the anti-Semitic media, again very perceptive of you. I'm very glad that you raised it. The Anti-Defamation League has named Egypt as having one of the worst official state-sanctioned media in terms of anti-Semitism.

And frankly, it's amusing to us that it is the diplomatic bread and butter that Egypt uses -- the Egyptian regime, rather, because there is a difference between the regime and Egypt as a country and its people -- in terms of gaining relevance in the international community, and with the United States.

"We are the first country to have made a peace treaty with Israel." And that is historical, and that is something that is being milked and exploited time and time and time again, that "we

are friends of Israel." So it's amusing to us, those of us that follow the Egyptian media, just to see how pernicious and prevalent the media is as far as anti-Semitism.

Abroad, you see a different face, which is friendly to the United States and friendly to Israel. At home, the enemies as promoted by the state-sanctioned media are the United States, Copts, and Israel. So what has been done is a very good question. I know that it's been raised repeatedly by U.S. politicians with the Egyptian government, and I'd be curious to hear, actually -- Congressman, you said that you raised it with President Mubarak yourself -- what the response was.

Because it's dismal. There may be a cold, official peace there, but there will never be any warming of relations as long as this kind of manipulative tactic continues, which is "Blame anybody but us, the regime. Anybody but us is responsible for governance failures, is responsible for your general misery, desperation, et cetera, et cetera."

Mr. Smith. Final questions: should there be any linkages to the mistreatment of the Copts in any further foreign aid that is provided to -- conditionality, is what I'm saying. Secondly, as you know, Egypt is a partner to the OSCE. I will be chairing the OSCE, Helsinki Commission, again this year.

Alcee Hastings actually serves as our special rep to the Mediterranean partners, as we call them. What do you think we ought to be doing within the OSCE to bring out the plight and the persecution of the Copts? Any thoughts you have on that?

Third, years ago I remember talking to the third Secretary of the Egyptian embassy here in the United States, and I had been intrigued by the operations that were taking place at Zeitoun. I know in Medjugorje, one of the men who was a visionary there, Ivan Dragicevic, and I followed that very closely as a matter of faith.

And I know that many hundreds of thousands of people saw Our Lady at Zeitoun. And I'm wondering -- and that included this man, who was a Muslim. And he said "Well, I've seen her too." And I almost fell off my chair. I was standing up, but if I'd had a chair I would have fallen off of it. Because here was a person within the embassy telling me that. And I'm wondering if that has had any impact on the reaching out and the conciliation between Muslims and Christians in Egypt, that Our Lady did take the time, and I think it's real, to visit there. And I'll get to your answers.

Ms. DUNNE. Thank you, Congressman. Let me speak to the issue of aid conditionality. I really think that the United States needs to deal with the Egyptian government in a much more serious way regarding the internal conditions in Egypt overall.

As I mentioned, discrimination and violence against Christians is part of a broader picture of human rights abuses. And Ms. Guirguis also mentioned, there is a very big transition coming in Egypt -- eventually, but probably pretty soon -- in leadership. And Egypt desperately needs to enter a new era, in which political freedom, and respect for human rights, and so forth, would spread within the country.

It has been stagnant, politically and socially, for a very long time now. Twenty, thirty years now. So I think that the United States needs to approach the government of Egypt, try if we can to work with the existing leadership, but also to be looking beyond, to a new era, and to rethink the entire relationship -- the aid relationship -- and try to develop a new partnership with Egypt that would be based on an idea of Egypt moving forward on all of these issues.

Now, to be frank with you, in the past I have often not been in favor of specific aid conditionality on specific issues, because I thought that it would not succeed. The Egyptian



government has a great deal of national pride, and once a demand is made public and a specific price is attached to it, there's just no way they're meeting that.

So in a way, it almost guarantees that it won't succeed, because of the particular way that the Egyptian government operates. But I do think that, as I said, we need to consider the whole relationship. We need to send the message to Egypt that "We want to be your partner. We want this relationship to move forward. But we really need to see where you're going with these major issues inside your country."

And as I said, I think that aid conditionality or withdrawing aid might have to be part of the picture in the future, if we continue to see the Egyptian government absolutely refusing to engage with us on these issues.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. I agree completely with Ms. Dunne. I think that all the tools of tough diplomacy need to be considered at this point, because it's clear that the U.S. is not being listened to. And despite the fact that the entire assistance package represents a very small, tiny percentage of the entire Egyptian economy at this point, that's not the point.

The point is symbolic. And you know what? In the past, it has worked. So I'm not saying that that's the answer; I'm saying that it is a tool that exists among several other tools. We have a strategic dialogue, we have military cooperation. We have many other things, trade agreements, to consider.

That is a tool, which -- let me just put it this way, it should not be foreclosed. And it was very disheartening to us, as human rights activists, to see Secretary Gates travel to Egypt at the outset of the Obama administration and announce publically that aid to Egypt would never be conditioned.

You just never put your cards on the table like that. So it is a tool to be considered, and it seems, indeed, that as the Egyptian regime becomes more intransigent and more insecure, that this may be a tool that ought to be given more and more thought in the coming days.

Ms. SHEA. Just quickly, I'd like to say that the Commission will be seriously reviewing the CPC status for Egypt this spring. I, for one, will be voting in favor of listing it among the world's worst countries. And that opens the way to sanctions, or even cutting back on individual visas, which has been effective in some places, for government officials who may want to travel to the United States.

The OSCE, I would encourage you to work with our allies there. The Foreign Minister of Italy, Franco Frattini, has spoken out on this issue of the Copts, and wants to -- and Iraq -- and wants to bring it to the international bodies as well. And some of our other allies there.

Regarding the Blessed Mother, I think that we should pray. And I will also quote Saint Ignatius Loyola, saying "We all should act as if it all depended on us."

Mr. SMITH. That's excellent. And let me -- if I could, Mr. Chairman, very, very briefly -- you know, no president, no government, like conditionality, particularly human rights conditionality. But I had a game-changer view of that for me in terms of what really happens in the real world in 1983, when I met with President Duarte in El Salvador, with Ambassador Cord, our ambassador at the time.

And I asked him -- because sanctions, and human rights sanctions with regards to the right wing death squads was the raging issue. And privately he said "It helps within." He was able to, in his government, work very hard to ensure that there was no complicity with those murderers. And I think Mubarak, or whoever ends up leading Egypt, they may protest loudly from a microphone, but internally it can help bring in real reform. Thank you.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you, Mr. Smith. Mr. Pitts?

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, Rita, thank you for your testimony. A couple of questions for you. You mentioned a recommendation for safehouses or safe homes. Would you elaborate on that? Did you mean in neighboring countries? Explain what you meant, where they should be located, for the vulnerable victims.

SISTER RITA. You know, what I really meant here is in the neighboring countries where people are receiving asylum, they are living in kind of an unsafe condition. And I think, sir, there is kind of a need for creating that safe environment for them.

In terms of these people who flee their countries because of the persecution or oppression, there is a need for housing and -- yes, in the countries of their first asylum.

Mr. PITTS. In regard to the persecution of the minority groups, the Christian groups in Iraq, have any of the Christian groups in Iraq conducted retaliatory actions that have helped fuel a cycle of sectarian violence, or not?

SISTER RITA. Can you repeat the question?

Mr. PITTS. Have any Christian groups taken retaliation measures, any kind of actions to cause the cycle to continue?

SISTER RITA. No.

Mr. PITTS. One thing I'm very concerned about, not only in Iraq but Egypt, is the educational curriculum, and the status of hate speech, and stereotypical speech, and speech to encourage violence in textbooks. Are there any steps being implemented in Iraq, as far as educational curriculum, to foster a growth of greater tolerance within Iraqi society as they teach the young in schools?

SISTER RITA. I have been away from the country, but I am not sure really right now how to answer this questions.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you. I'll ask the same question of the panel here, as far as Egypt. One of the things I also raised with President Mubarak numerous times is the hate speech, if you will -- that's what I call it -- the stereotypical language that promotes intolerance and hatred, and violence towards not only Coptic, but Jewish people. Is there any kind of improvement at all in the educational curricula in Egypt in this regard?

Ms. GUIRGUIS. I am not aware, Congressman, of any improvement in this regard, at all.

Mr. PITTS. Nina, let me ask you. Has USCIRF visited Egypt or Iraq? Do you have any plans to visit, to interview, talk to the people who are experiencing the religious intolerance, check on police, reports of police negligence or inadequate protection? Have you visited? Do you have any plans to visit or send anyone?

Ms. SHEA. We have had several trips to both countries. We were in Egypt about a year ago. The government restricted the mission, the Egyptian government would not let us talk to, go visit the Christian village in Nag Hammadi that was attacked at that time. We do have plans to go back.

Mr. PITTS. Do you issue reports on your visits?

Ms. SHEA. Yes, we do. And it's at our website, [www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov), because the Commission, of course, is an independent agency created by Congress. So yes, we have interviewed refugees throughout the region, from Iraq. We have spoken to, for years, the Iraqi officials, and have visited there and continued to monitor the situation very closely.

So it's getting worse. And we, in 2008, put Iraq on the Country of Particular Concern list at that time, because of what we saw going on with the minorities at that time already. It's now apparent that it's a religious cleansing, so it's not even just a targeting of Christians.

And one of the problems is that the U.S. policy has been blind to the minorities, and partly, I believe, the reason is because they don't engage in violence. They don't have militias. They don't cause trouble. So that while the U.S. government has worked very closely with the various divisions, sectors within Iraq, like the Kurds, or the Sunnis or the Shi'ites, it hasn't done so with these minorities. The surge, we were told, would float everybody's boats, that it would help everybody in Iraq.

In fact, it probably made things worse for the Christians, because it flushed al-Qaeda northward, into the Nineveh area, into Mosul, where the Christians have their ancestral homes, and where many of them live. And that's still the most violent part of Iraq today, is around Mosul in general, but also the targeting of the Christians.

So we've been blind to these minorities and their plight, and that they have a very special -- they're facing something very special, which is a determination by a ruthless terrorist group to eradicate them. At the same time, it's a one-two punch. The government of Iraq has been fairly indifferent to them, very indifferent to them, and has marginalized them.

Mr. PITTS. One of the issues I raised with the Egyptian authorities when I was there, I visited privately with a man who was put in prison for seven months -- he was tortured, electric prods used -- because he had made a simple request. He had made a request that, since -- he was a Christian, he had converted from Muslim to Christian, and he had a two year old son.

And on the little son's ID card, he was listed as Muslim. And he went and asked "Could you please change this to Christian? We're a Christian family." And for that, he was put in prison, interrogated, beat, all types of things like that.

What's the condition now for the ID cards? Has it changed at all? Is it still the same, if you're a child of a former Muslim father, are you listed as Muslim on your ID card? Can you speak to that? Do you know?

Ms. GUIRGUIS. There have been court rulings pertaining to converts themselves mandating that the conversion be legally recognized. However, the issue of the children remains unresolved, and still in some cases it's required that it be written that you were formerly Muslim. So it's still there.

Mr. SMITH. So on the ID it says "Formerly Muslim," so that is a trigger for persecution, discrimination.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. For targeting, exactly.

Mr. SMITH. Another issue I raised with the Egyptian government was the lack of prosecution of people in the al-Kosheh case, where 21 Coptic Christians were murdered, and still no prosecutions, and the failure of the Egyptian courts to prosecute people who have committed violence or police who have been negligent, or whatever. Is there any improvement as far as prosecution for violence against Christians or minorities?

Ms. DUNNE. Yes, Congressman, I would -- you mentioned in the al-Kosheh case. There was a failure at the level of the investigation, you know? And I have heard it said -- there certainly have been accusations that the investigation was deliberately botched, because they didn't want -- they wanted to sweep it under the rug, they didn't want to have convictions and so forth, for a misplaced fear of stirring up more trouble.

What we're seeing in the more recent cases, so with these shootings at Nag Hammadi last year, people were arrested. We have seen, now, one conviction, and there are two others awaiting the end of their trial. We may be seeing some improvement in the seriousness of handling these most serious cases of killing. Other cases, of property destruction and so forth, I think much less so.

But even so, for example in the January 11th shooting attack, in which one Christian man was killed and five others were wounded, all of them Christians, the Egyptian authorities are very eager to control information that gets out. They were very eager to say "This is not a sectarian attack," and to contradict at least some of the eyewitness testimony that it had been, that the Christians had been deliberately targeted.

So this is why I mentioned in my testimony that I hope that the Egyptian authorities will not only prosecute these crimes, but allow the information to come out. Because I think they're going to be very, very careful with what they allow to come out about these crimes, because they want, in any possibility, to minimize the sectarian aspects.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. If I may add to that, Congressman?

Mr. PITTS. Yes.

Ms. GUIRGUIS. I don't think that there is a genuine improvement reflecting a will on the part of the regime to actually enforce the rule of law. I do think that, as I mentioned previously, cases where public pressure and international media spotlight is brought to bear, there is a reaction there.

However, there are numerous other cases, patterns in Upper Egypt in particular, where this kind of sporadic violence is routine, on a daily basis. Where Christians are murdered, and the murderers evade accountability. So I'm going to differ with Ms. Dunne a little bit, and say that accountability is missing for felonies and murders, as long as they kind of fly under the radar.

And the Egyptian government, as Ms. Dunne said, does a very good job of trying to control information, and trying to propagate misinformation.

Mr. PITTS. Regarding the Alexandria attack, particularly in light of several months during which salafists, under the watchful eye of police, held numerous demonstrations and shouted violent anti-Coptic slogans, and carried posters with slogans, some of which were prosecutable under Egyptian law -- I have a whole list of slogans here that they used, "Oh, Shenouda, we won't let you, we will set fire to your cross. Oh, curse Shenouda, we won't let you, wherever you go. Oh, Shenouda, you symbol of unholiness. Shenouda is the head of sedition, he is a danger to our ummah." And "Boycott the Kafirs," with an image of a church with a cross, and a photo of Shenouda wearing a hat with devil horns, both superimposed on a map of the U.S., and on and on.

I don't need to read all these slogans, but what more could the Egyptian authorities have done to prevent the Alexandria attacks, since they saw all of this for months in advance?

Ms. GUIRGUIS. Great question, Congressman. I'm glad that this has all come to your attention. As a matter of fact, a few hours before the Alexandria massacre, there were mass protests, going out and saying "Shenouda, Shenouda, we're going to make your whole year full of blood," or "covered in blood," essentially.

Direct incitement to violence, direct threats. Where were the Egyptian security forces that we see ubiquitously in every other peaceful protest, rounding up people, detaining people, torturing them? Those protests were undertaken on a routine basis after Friday prayers, since September of this past year.

Thousands would march in the streets with direct incitements to violence, and state security forces stood by and watched, and did plainly nothing.

Mr. PITTS. Finally, for all of you, what more could the U.S. government do? What's the most effective way that members of Congress or the U.S. government can focus in on terms of interaction with the Egyptian government.

Michele, I was intrigued by your comments on aid conditionality, that you see a change coming -- we all know that it's coming, and we want to maintain and move forward with our relationship with Egypt. But challenging them to step up and explain where they're going on issues like religious freedom, political rights. What is the most effective thing that we could be doing to bring the change that we all would like to see?

Ms. DUNNE. I think the most effective thing, Congressman, that we could be doing is sending the message, and sending it consistently, that the U.S. wants to have a partnership with Egypt, but it also wants to see Egypt dealing with its domestic issues -- including human rights, including religious freedom, including political participation and democratization -- in an effective way.

And there really has been a problem, I think, of the Egyptian government receiving very mixed signals from the United States. Members of Congress will consistently raise issues like human rights and religious freedom, but sometimes members of the administration will not.

Or some members of the administration will, and others -- for example, in the military, or those in intelligence and counterterrorism cooperation -- send different signals. I agree with what Ms. Guirguis said earlier, that aid conditionality is a tool.

But what's really important here to the Egyptian government is the big picture, of whether the United States is an ally of Egypt, and whether the United States promotes the importance of Egypt in the region, and so forth. So we need to find ways to send this signal that "Yes, we want to be there in our relationship with you, but we're deeply concerned about where you're going internally, and we'd like to see you headed in a new direction."

And I think the first thing we need to do is just get the message right, and get it consistent. And then we can think about specific tools that we may need to use to bring to bear on this situation.

Mr. PITTS. I know that Frank and Chris are great champions, and they've been here 31 years. And one message that I try to give to these heads of state when I meet with them is "Presidents come and go. Policies change with administrations. But we're bound by the law, and some of us have been here a long time. Some of us will continue to be here a while."

Is there a law, is there something we can put in place that will bind us to improve the conditions and use the tools of tough diplomacy that you mentioned, Dina? Are there any other things that you would like to emphasize?

Ms. GUIRGUIS. I would only add that, despite some sort of hostile posturing at times, Egypt cares very deeply about its relationship with the United States. Never underestimate that. And Egypt is critical as far as swaying the entire region, as well. It used to be that whichever way Egypt sways, the region sways.

If we're headed towards an era of darkness, intolerance, sectarianism, de-illumination of religious diversity and political pluralism, you bet you're going to start seeing the ripple effects of that in the region, and vice versa.

If Egypt is put on the right track, many other countries will follow suit. And please just always bear in mind, there are multiple mutual interests between the United States in Egypt, as I mentioned, trade agreements, military exchanges, and more. And every tool of diplomacy ought to be considered. Nothing should be foreclosed at the outset of a discussion or a negotiation.

Mr. PITTS. Nina?

Ms. SHEA. I just want to say that the time to act is now. In the wake of what has happened in Tunisia, Egypt certainly must be feeling some insecurity right now, the Mubarak regime. The United States should use all its tools. The Obama administration started out in

Cairo with its new beginning speech, and there made quite detailed remarks about the freedoms for Muslim charities, and Muslim female dress. But really, I think it was Mr. Smith who said, just an oblique comment about the Copts, and nothing about the Iraqi Christians.

We need to change immediately, and really start giving our message that these people need to be protected. The radicalization has to stop. The government's fomenting of hatred and radicalization has to stop. Its education has to be reformed. Its judicial system -- equal justice should be granted for all its citizens, not just -- not excluding the Christians.

So I think that that concerted message, if it's given now, may make a difference. And also with sanctions, I think there is a law, the International Religious Freedom Act, and it has a trigger once a country is designated a country of particular concern. And I think that we need to start using it.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you. Each of you have been eloquent spokespeople for the persecuted minorities and advocates for good human rights policies. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you, Mr. Pitt. I am not going to ask, but I hope a representative of the State Department stayed for the entire testimony, because I want to say I think all four did an outstanding job.

And I think I can just say that Mr. Smith, Mr. Pitts, and myself -- we will stay with this issue. It's not going to be a hearing that kind of goes away. And I know the Egyptian embassy is here. I think they should know that we are going to stay with this issue, come what may. So I want to thank all of you once again for your testimony, and the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:21 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

## **APPENDIX A, STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY COPTIC AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION**

Christmas and the New Year were marked by two bloody and ominous attacks on Christian worshippers in Iraq and Egypt.

On December 30th, in Baghdad, at least two Christians were killed and nine wounded in a string of six attacks on Christian homes. The areas targeted were predominantly Christian areas, and the homes attacked were specifically Christian homes. And, on New Year's Eve, an even more lethal attack resulted in the massacre of over 20 Egyptian Coptic Christians in the ancient city of Alexandria.

The old year ended and the new one opened with bloodshed that tragically points to attempts to systematically annihilate the ancient churches of the Middle East.

The word "genocide" - not one which should ever be used lightly or for rhetorical effect - is the correct terminology when a campaign sets out to annihilate an ethnic, religious, racial or national group.

A legal definition of genocide is found in the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Article 2 defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

Consider that definition when assessing first the appalling situation in Iraq - brought home to us by the 31st October attack against the Syrian Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad in which 58 were killed. At the time of the October attacks in Baghdad the perpetrators also threatened violence against Egypt's Coptic Christian communities - a threat which came to pass on New Year's Eve. They have vowed to eradicate Christian believers in the region.

The international community may not yet be willing to recognise these events as part of a genocidal campaign but unless they wake up to the nature of these atrocities it will only be a matter of time before the definitions catch up with the realities. No doubt hand wringing "statesmen" will then claim they had no idea how bad the situation had become.

The violence against Egypt's Copts is hardly new but it has been intensifying - with barely a murmur of protest.

The Alexandria attack sharply underlines the vulnerability of Egypt's Christians. The bomb attack outside the al-Qidiseen church ("Church of the Two Saints") took place as worshippers were leaving a midnight service to celebrate the New Year. It is said that if the Mass had ended two minutes earlier the number of fatalities would have been massive. According to the official figures at least 21 were killed and 79 were injured.

The injured also include eight Muslims. The church and a nearby mosque suffered extensive damage from the blast

Initially the authorities believed a car bomb was used, but now they believe a suicide bomber was responsible. The attack prompted angry clashes between Christians and local Muslims during which the mosque opposite the church was further damaged. The police used tear gas to disperse the crowds.

The al-Qidiseen church was one of three churches which were attacked in April 2006 by a man wielding a knife, killing one person and injuring 17 others.

The massacre has been widely denounced by political and religious leaders in Egypt, including the Grand Mufti and other Muslims. This is to be welcomed, but the Egyptian Government's own role hardly stands up to scrutiny or examination. It is alleged that the authorities withdrew their security officials from the vicinity of the church about an hour before the attacks took place.

These attacks are part of a worsening pattern, sanctioned by the authorities, which I have observed since the publication, in 1992, of my report for the Jubilee Campaign, on the discrimination faced by Egyptian Copts. Having also served as honorary President of The UK Coptic Association I have also seen regular reports of the worsening situation. It disturbs me greatly that there seems considerable global indifference to the escalating violence against the Copts.

Egypt's Copts make up some 12 million from a population of 80 million Egyptians and they face major human rights violations and are being increasingly persecuted. It is hard to believe that this is happening to them in 21st Century Egypt, which prides itself on being a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The events in Alexandria find an echo in the drive-by massacre of churchgoers leaving midnight mass on Coptic Orthodox Christmas Eve on January 6, 2010, in Nag Hammadi. Six Copts were killed and nine others were seriously injured. Later, in Giza on November 24, 2010, the State's own forces opened fire on peaceful Coptic protesters, worshipping in St. Mary and St. Michael's Church.

In between those two incidents there were attacks on churches, collective punishment of Copts, abduction and, in collusion with the State, there have been incidents of Coptic minors being forced to convert - an increasing phenomenon. Increasing, too, have been demonstrations, which have been staged over fifteen consecutive weeks, by radical Islamists - demonstrations which have targeted the Coptic Church and its head, the saintly Pope Shenouda.

These demonstrations have been fanned by radical Muslim clerics and the Egyptian media, based on allegations that the church is abducting Christian girls who converted to Islam and locking them up in monasteries, and of stockpiling weapons in monasteries for later use against Muslims, espousing sectarian hatred and violence against the Copts.

On November 18th the US Commission on International Religious Freedom reported that "This kind of rhetoric goes too far and stokes the fire of extremists looking for ammunition to justify violent acts against religious minorities". USCIRF has placed Egypt on its watch list for religious freedom that requires close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the government

The number of violations against the Copts for the year 2010 are not yet published, but, from January 2008 to January 2010, there were at least 52 incidents of sectarian violence or tension-about two incidents a month-which took place in 17 of Egypt's 29 governorates.

The vast majority of such sectarian incidents were waged by Muslims against Copts, taking the form of "collective revenge". This springs from an irrational conviction that all Christians should be made to pay for any grievance caused by a random Christian, in no way related to the original cause of the complaint.



According to the US International Religious Freedom Report 2010 published on December 17, "The status of respect for religious freedom by the government remained poor, unchanged from the previous year."

The killings in Alexandria and Baghdad underline the urgency and gravity of the situation. - and the need for all of us to speak up for the persecuted ancient churches.

A letter to the Egyptian and Iraqi Ambassadors in London, to the Foreign Secretary William Hague, and to your own local MP, urging them to demand protection and security for the ancient churches might help to save lives and prevent the escalation of these traumatic events into the full scale genocide which threatens to unravel.

Over the Christmas break you will have seen reports of attacks on Christian communities in Iraq and Egypt.

On December 30th in Baghdad at least two Christians were killed and nine wounded in a string of six attacks on Christian homes. The areas targeted were predominantly Christian areas, and the homes targeted were specifically Christian homes. The old year ended and the new one has opened with bloodshed that tragically points to the systematic annihilation of the ancient churches of the Middle East.

The appalling situation in Iraq - brought home to us by the 31st October attack against the Syrian Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad in which 58 were killed - was commented upon over Christmas by Pope Benedict and by Dr. Rowan Williams. At the time of the October attacks in Baghdad the perpetrators also threatened violence against Egypt's Coptic Christian communities.

That came to pass last night, on New Year's Eve, in Alexandria. The violence against Egypt's Copts has been intensifying - with hardly a murmur of protest. Unless urgent action is taken, Egypt's Copts will be destined to suffer the same fate as Christians in Iraq.

The Alexandria attack sharply underlines the vulnerability of Egypt's Christians. The bomb attack outside the al-Qidiseen church ("Church of the Two Saints") took place as worshippers were leaving a midnight service to celebrate the New Year. According to the official figures at least 21 were killed and 79 were injured. The injured include eight Muslims. The church and a nearby mosque suffered extensive damage from the blast

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The attack has been widely denounced by political by religious leaders in Egypt. The al-Qidiseen church was one of three churches which were attacked in April 2006 by a man wielding a knife, killing one person and injuring 17 others.

These attacks are part of a worsening pattern which Coptic American Friendship Association has observed since 1980. It disturbs me greatly that there seems considerable global indifference to the escalating violence against the Copts.

Egypt's Copts make up some 15 million from a population of 85 million Egyptians and they face major human rights violations and are being increasingly persecuted. It is hard to believe that this is happening to them in 21st Century Egypt, which prides itself on being a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The events in Alexandria find an echo in the drive-by massacre of churchgoers leaving midnight mass on Coptic Orthodox Christmas Eve on January 6, 2010, in Nag Hammadi. Six Copts were killed and nine others were seriously injured. The year end with deadly violence in St. Mary and St. Michael's Church, in Giza on November 24, 2010, in which the State's own forces opened fire on peaceful Coptic protesters,

In between those two incidents there were attacks on churches, collective punishment of Copts, abduction and forced

Islamisation of Coptic minors by Muslims in collusion with State Security is also an increasing phenomenon. So, too, are demonstrations, which have been staged over fifteen consecutive weeks, by radical Islamists - demonstrations which have targeted the Coptic Church and its head, Pope Shenouda.

These demonstrations have been fanned by radical Muslim clerics and the Egyptian media, based on allegations that the church is abducting Christian girls who converted to Islam and locking them up in monasteries, and of stockpiling weapons in monasteries for later use against Muslims, espousing sectarian hatred and violence against the Copts.

On November 18th the US Commission on International Religious Freedom reported that "This kind of rhetoric goes too far and stokes the fire of extremists looking for ammunition to justify violent acts against religious minorities".. USCIRF has placed Egypt on its watch list for religious freedom that requires close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the government

The number of violations against the Copts for the year 2010 are not yet published, but, from January 2008 to January 2010, there have been at least 52 incidents of sectarian violence or tension-about two incidents a month-which have taken place in 17 of Egypt's 29 governorates. These were the scene of violent incidents which were all waged by Muslims against Christians, according to a two-year study by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), a reputable NGO, that monitors the situation of freedoms-especially religious freedoms-in Egypt:

The vast majority of such sectarian incidents were waged by Muslims against Copts, taking the form of "collective revenge" owing to an irrational conviction that all Christians should be made to pay for the mistake committed by a Christian in no way related to them.

The second pattern of collective revenge targets Christians who attempt to conduct religious rituals in a new church they build, or in an existing one which they restore or expand, or in a building they convert into a church, or again by holding prayers in an ordinary building or inside the home of one of them.

The situation is rejected not only by neighbouring Muslims, but also by representatives of the State, who refuse the gathering of Christians for prayer in one of their homes, and, according to the EIPR study, they retaliate by arresting the worshippers and questioning them.

Church building in Egypt is still restricted by the contemporary interpretation of the 1856 Ottoman Hamayouni decree, still partially in force, which requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build new churches.

In addition, Ministry of Interior (MOI) regulations, issued in 1934 under the Al-Ezabi decree, specify a set of 10 conditions that the government must consider before a presidential decree for construction of a new non-Muslim place of worship can be issued. The conditions include the requirement that the distance that a church may be no closer than 100 meters (340 feet) from a mosque and that approval of the

neighbouring Muslim community must be obtained before a permit to build a new church may be issued. Moreover, the State Security often imposes its authority, making the process difficult even after obtaining a presidential decree.

According to the US International Religious Freedom Report 2010 published on December 17, 2010, "The status of respect for religious freedom by the government remained poor, unchanged from the previous year."

There is no indication that Egypt's political leadership, or the wider international community, has come to realise the need to address the "Coptic issue." While the government makes great efforts to present to the outside world an optimistic picture of the situation of the Copts, it does little to address the reality.

Last week President Mubarak gave a speech regarding the laws in front of Parliament for this session. Once again, and for the 6th year running, the long awaited new law to deal with the regulation of church buildings was omitted.

Let me underline the nature of this serious situation by mentioning three recent violations:

#### 1. Firing Live Ammunition at Coptic Protesters

On November 24, 2010, at the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mary and St. Michael's, in Talbiya, Omraniya district of Giza province, which is still under construction, some 5000 security forces personnel opened fire, used tear gas and hurled stones on men, women, children who were present at the church grounds, in order to disperse them, halt construction and demolish the building. The Copts hurled stones at the forces.

The Coptic crowd, many bearing makeshift crosses, decided to approach the Giza governorate and to protest against what they saw as an unjustified attack against them. They were incensed that the problem had appeared to have been resolved as the governor had sent his secretary to the congregation on the previous evening advising them that the governor has approved the building to be a church.

The clashes resumed in front of the Giza governorate building, where the angry protesters also felt deceived by the governor. They hurled stones at the building facade and at parked vehicles, while security forces opened fire again on them. Some news sites circulated news that security sources explained the unusually harsh response they used against the Coptic demonstrators by claiming the Copts had hurled Molotov cocktails at the Giza governorate headquarters, a claim which eye-witnesses categorically deny.

The clashes resulted in the death of three Coptic men from bullet wounds and a four year old child from tear gas being thrown inside the chapel. More than 79 Copts were injured, suffering mostly gunshot wounds, some severely, and 157 people including women were arrested randomly from the streets. In addition 22 teenagers and children as young as 9-years old were also arrested. The detainees were charged with 14 charges which ranged from demonstrating illegally, carrying white weapons and blocking public roads; to the intentional destruction of public property for a terrorist purpose and the attempt to kill police officials. Such charges carry sentences of 15 years imprisonment.

It transpired that the building had been licensed as a Church-owned-and-operated social services building but the Copts who had for years tried in vain to obtain licence to build a church-Egyptian law and regulations pre-condition almost prohibitive procedures for the licensing of new churches-were using it as a church. The building violation was exposed when they began to add a dome.

The Church Diocese in Giza issued a statement, saying "The Governor of Giza gave instructions to modify the services building to a church building, but a decision by the Chief of the District to halt construction and remove the irregularities angered the people, who congregated next to the building, fearing that the district authorities would cause damage to it, triggered the events and the clashes."

Some 40 private and human rights lawyers were banned by security officials on orders of the General Prosecutor from attending interrogations of Copts before prosecution.

Injured detainees were shackled to their beds in hospital, or were sent to detainment camps before completing their medical treatment prompting an outcry from Egyptian NGOs.

NGOs in Egypt and abroad condemned the attack, and called on Public Prosecutor to prosecute the security personnel responsible for the death and the injury of Coptic protesters.

November's events were a serious escalation in the State's treatment of its Christian citizens. This is not simply about social violence occasioned by the construction of a church, but, according to Hossam Bahgat, EIPR's Executive Director, "rather security forces opening fire on protesters demanding their constitutional right to worship without arbitrary interference or discrimination."

Meanwhile the Egyptian Attorney General under pressure by human rights organization and Pope Shenouda, who went into retreat to a monastery in protest, released 133 of the 157 detainees and on January 6th released the rest of the detainees. However, no one was questioned over who was responsible for giving the shooting order.

Human rights advocates reported that this incident exemplified an increasingly prevalent pattern of governmental authorities detaining Copts following sectarian attacks and either holding them without charges or threatening false charges and a police record; the detentions serve as a tool to blackmail Coptic authorities to desist from demanding criminal prosecution of the perpetrators and to dissuade the victims and/or their families from seeking recourse in the judicial system for restitution of damages.

On December 10, in an effort to end any hopes for the Coptic Christians of using the Church of St. Mary and St. Michael's in Talbiya for prayer services, the Giza Governorate converted overnight a house facing the church into a mosque, less than 100 metres away.

This kind of devious undertaking has often been used by State Security to stop any project for a church, in addition to deploying Muslims in the area to contest the presence of a church in their neighbourhood.

The church premises are now occupied by State Security to make sure that no one prays there, and judging from previous cases the church will remain closed.

The Coptic Church filed a case against the Giza Governorate on the basis that its decision to halt construction of the Church was illegal as the area where the church is built is not subject to any kind of building permissions.

## 2. Muslims Torch Coptic Homes

On November 15, 2010 the village of al-Nawahid, in Qena province some 290 miles south of Cairo, a Muslim mob of nearly 1000, set fire overnight to 22 houses belonging to Coptic Christians over rumours that 19-year-old Copt Hossam Noel Attallah and a 17-year-old Muslim girl, Rasha Mohamed Hussein had an affair.

They threw fireballs, gasoline and stones at Coptic homes and detonated Butane Gas cylinders. Christian-owned homes were looted and shops were broken into, plundered and burned. Cattle belonging to Copts were stolen, their fields and plants uprooted. There were no reported casualties.

An eyewitness who was himself beaten by Muslims said the mob blocked the fire brigade from reaching the burning homes and one fire engine arrived hours late. He also said that security forces went into the houses of Copts and arrested them.

Copts accused the authorities of severe inadequacy, because although being aware of the incident of the Copt and the Muslim girl, they only stationed three security cars at the entrances of the village. Ra'fat, head of Luxor EUHRO NGO reports that "When the security officers saw the large mobs entering the village from all sides and attacking it, they fled, leaving it unprotected to operations of terrorism, sabotage, arson and looting of Coptic property." He added that security forces were only guarding St. George's Church.

The Chief Prosecutor went to survey the damage but refused to listen to any of the Coptic victims, speak to witnesses who saw the perpetrators or even to register the names of the accused.

It was reported that State Security forced thirteen Coptic families to sign papers stating the fire happened as an "Act of Fate" and was extinguished by security and the village Muslims. A Coptic victim poignantly asked "Have you ever heard of such humiliation?"

"Whoever refused to sign was beaten up. We were afraid to be detained by security, so we signed" he added. He confirmed that the police know all of the perpetrators.

As police decided it was an "Act of Fate", they are not entitled to claim compensation, also none of the Muslim perpetrators were indicted. The Muslim girl was released after undertaking a medical exam which proved that she was still a virgin; the fate of the Coptic young man is unknown.

The examples of collective punishment of Copts which I have cited were repeated at:

1. Farshout, - where, in November a three day rampage against Copts occurred when 86 Coptic-owned properties were torched, prompted by the alleged sexual assault of a Coptic man on a Muslim girl; and
2. Nag Hammadi, after the Christmas Eve massacre of January 6, 2010, Muslim torched and looted in Bahgoura 43 homes and shops.

### 3. MERSA MATROUH

On March 12 2010, a Muslim mob assaulted some 400 Christians during prayers in the church of the services building affiliated to the Coptic Church in Rifeyah, Mersa Matrouh, under the pretext that the Copts had carried out construction work without permission from the authorities placing a fence around their newly acquired plot of land with a gate that would close a short-cut to the adjacent mosque

The mob, estimated to be between 2000-3000 of Bedouins and fanatical Muslim Salafis, hurled stones at the building. Four priests, the deacons and 400 parishioners were trapped for 14 hours inside the building until Security forces arrived from Alexandria and escorted the 400 terrorised Copts to their homes.

While the Copts were trapped, the mob moved on to other areas not protected by security, vandalizing and torching Coptic homes, shops, businesses and cars in the streets surrounding the services building.

Twenty-five Copts were seriously wounded, including women and children. Eighteen houses, twenty-two shops and sixteen cars were destroyed and burnt down.

The Reverend Matta Zakaria said that "The violence started after the Muslim evening prayer when the Mosque's Imam, Shaikh Khamees, preached the need to fight the 'enemies', and said 'we don't want Christians to live among us.'"

Egyptian Security authorities arrested 13 Copts, including 4 minors between 13 and 17 who were later released due to being underage.

The suspects and 9 Copts, faced charges of illegal congregation, destruction of public property, arson and assault. The church pulled down the fence.

Copts, albeit the victims, were arrested as usual to force the church to accept an unfair reconciliation with the perpetrators, who always escape indictment, to get the Copts out of prison.

The commission will, I am sure, agree that this situation is grievous and that far more needs to be done to encourage the Egyptian authorities to provide security and protection for its Coptic minority - and to work much harder at promoting religious toleration and respect. I very much hope that you will arrange for a congressional assessment to be made of the deteriorating situation facing Egypt's Copts.

With kind regards,

Ihab Aziz

Executive Director

Coptic American Friendship Association (CAFA)

An NGO founded in 1994 as a 501 (C) (3) Human Rights Association based in Washington, DC  
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***Coptic American Friendship Association (CAFA)*** is a non-for-profit 501(c) (3) organization based in the greater Washington, DC area since 1996. CAFA advocates on behalf of the persecuted Christians by working with the American and international policy makers to improve the religious freedom conditions in Egypt and the Middle East. We work to promote non-sectarian religious rights in Egypt and the Middle East where all citizens are treated equally under the rule of civil laws. CAFA is a founding member of the International Union of Coptic Associations (IUCA).

## **APPENDIX B, STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY COPTIC SOLIDARITY**



### **Coptic Solidarity – Statement Submitted for the Record Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing - Christian Minorities Under Attack: Iraq and Egypt January 20, 2011**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing on “Christian Minorities Under Attack: Iraq and Egypt.” Our organization is deeply appreciative of your leadership over the years in raising awareness of and strongly responding to religious freedom violations around the world, particularly in Egypt. We are grateful for your and other Members’ efforts over the years - for giving us hope and for helping to bring concrete change in certain situations.

As you and many Members of Congress are well aware, Christians in Egypt have a difficult time living out their lives in peace. Numerous reports and media accounts document the attacks against Copts from the more notorious Al-Kosheh incidents of 1998 and 2000, to the day to day discrimination encountered on the job or walking down the streets, to the accounts of Christian girls being raped, forced to change their faith, and even marry their captors, to the Christmas attack in 2010 and the recent New Year’s bombing.

Governments do not need to engage in specific action in order for discrimination and persecution to occur. In fact, it can often be the *lack* of action that exacerbates and encourages persecution and discrimination. This occurs, for example, when threats of attacks are reported to the police and they and other security officials choose *not* to protect those against whom the threats are made. A prime example of this is a case in Egypt in which the government exonerated individuals charged with persecuting, arresting, and torturing over 1,000 Coptic Christians, and even gave job promotions to the state security officials responsible for the persecution.

Or, even further, persecution and discrimination occur when state-owned media is used by those desiring to incite hatred and violence against the Copts. Unfortunately, the government authorities rarely provide corrections or challenges to media that spread unfounded and unproven rumors or allegations.

Regrettably, such incitement to hatred has led to incidents where mobs which, with full impunity, take the law into their own hands to try to prevent “unauthorized” prayers. In addition, mobs have gathered to “punish” various Coptic communities when a young Coptic man is alleged to have had a romantic relationship with a Muslim young woman.

At times, Egypt has dealt with violence aimed at the Christian community by inferring that the attacks were random and not directed against Copts or that the attackers have mental problems.

In one year there were four cases where Christian clergy or schoolchildren were attacked in Egypt and the government deemed the attackers to be mentally unstable. This begs the question as to how so many unstable men have been allowed to become teachers and work with children, as well as why the victims in the attacks predominantly are Christian.

Over the past decade or so, the government has blamed Copts in the U.S., Europe, and Australia for tarnishing the image of Egypt by publicly raising awareness of the attacks against Christians and also by blaming democracy and NGO leaders who dare to talk about the human rights violations against Copts. In reality, it is the attackers and government officials who have hurt Egypt's image through their own actions, through ignoring the actions of other government officials, or by allowing extremists to attack human rights activists and Christians with impunity.

There are serious indications that some of the violence against the Copts is implemented by the state security apparatus. In November of last year, an armed group of over 2,000 security officials launched a ferocious attack on a community service building in Omrania, Guizeh. This armed attack stemmed from allegations that those using the building intended to designate an area for people to pray, but that the building operators had not obtained the mandatory presidential decree required for any type of religious activity. In a blatant use of excessive force, the security forces used rubber bullets and live ammunition to empty the building of people in an attack that left three persons killed and dozens wounded.

The tragedy of all these incidents against Copts is not only the actual attacks against Christians and against the fundamental rights of Copts to peacefully practice their faith and live as full Egyptian citizens within their own country, but also that those who perpetrate the violence against Copts are almost never punished. As a result, all Egyptians are at risk of their rights being violated. The pattern of the release of and/or lack of justice against perpetrators of murder and other crimes has sent the message, over a number of years, that Christians can be attacked in Egypt with impunity.

There are a few rare exceptions to this general rule. It is only recently that the government is holding attackers accountable for the murders of Copts reflected in the January 16, 2011, sentencing of the perpetrators in the drive-by shootings in the January 2010 Nag Hammadi attack.

The recent bombing of the church in Alexandria has been called by the New York Times "the worst attack against Egypt's Christian minority in recent history." Sadly, it is this most recent attack, that killed 23 and injured over 90 people, that finally may have wakened the Egyptian population at large to the threat facing Egypt as a whole.

The Coptic community at large deeply appreciates our Egyptian Muslim fellow citizens and colleagues standing in solidarity with us during the January Orthodox Christmas church services. It is this kind of fraternal action that is really needed, and it will hopefully endure beyond the current tragedy.

As Copts, we believe we deserve to be treated as full Egyptian citizens with all the rights and protections indicated by citizenship and international human rights conventions. We stand in



solidarity with the Egyptian people, particularly those who are promoting democracy, freedom, and justice for all people in Egypt.

So what should be done to address these deep-seated issues within the Egyptian Government and Egyptian society? It is vital that the Government of Egypt engage in tangible action to reflect their intent to treat Copts as full citizens of Egypt.

The Government of Egypt should:

1. Stop the cycle of violence directed against the Copts by taking concrete steps to provide security where needed and by transparently trying and prosecuting in the courts all those who perpetrate crimes against Copts.
2. End the bias, if not indirect complicity of security officials, against Copts by holding accountable and appropriately punishing those who allow attacks against Copts.
3. Eliminate the “hate discourse” in educational curricula and media, and highlight the foundational role of Copts in Egyptian history.
4. Protect and enforce the protection of the fundamental rights of Copts by guaranteeing the right of Copts to worship peacefully and freely; guaranteeing the freedom to build churches in full equality with mosques; allowing for Egyptians to change their religious affiliation to any religion of their choice; abolishing religious delineation from all government ID cards and other official documents.
5. Eliminate bias and discrimination against Copts by guaranteeing equal opportunities in all publicly-funded institutions, and penalize discriminatory practices in hiring and job promotion.
6. More directly guarantee liberty and equality for all Egyptians by ensuring that all public space is neutral in terms of religion; removing reference to religion in all constitutional and legal matters; ensuring that all national education promotes the values of human rights and equality in citizenship; ensuring equal opportunities in all publicly funded institutions; penalizing discriminatory practices in all public institutions; and providing an avenue to redress bias and discrimination where it exists.

The U.S. can press the Egyptian Government on each of the issues above as well. While we recognize that there are numerous policy issues between the two nations, including issues related to terrorism, it is these fundamental rights issues that will contribute to the stability and security in Egypt desired by both the US and Egypt.

**For more information, please contact:**

Coptic Solidarity

[www.copticsolidarity.com](http://www.copticsolidarity.com)

**APPENDIX C, THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: TRUE OR FALSE,  
SUBMITTED BY HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST**

**TO:** Members of Congress  
**FROM:** Human Rights First  
**RE:** The Muslim Brotherhood: True or False  
**DATE:** Monday, February 7, 2011

As the political future of Egypt has been plunged into uncertainty by mass protests that broke out on January 25, commentators and policy makers are expressing concerns about the implications of a greater role for the Muslim Brotherhood in the future government of Egypt.

A major problem with speculations about the future role of the Brotherhood is that they are just that—speculations. This is uncharted territory for Egypt. No one—possibly not even the Brotherhood—knows right now what it might do if it is presented with an opportunity to run openly in free elections. Bold assertions of what they will or will not do should be viewed with skepticism. The Brotherhood has already stated that it does not intend to run a candidate for the presidency. But there is no doubt that in a future, more open political climate in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood will be a force on the scene.

There are valid concerns about what the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood might be in Egypt and in the region. For now, it shares the democratic goals of the mainstream opposition groups. If the Brotherhood joins in a government, it would have to choose among priorities it has pursued in recent years in the spheres of education, social services, and religion. And although its rhetoric has often favored a withdrawal from the Camp David Accords with Israel and the U.S., there are other elements within the Brotherhood who will advocate for regional stability. What a Muslim Brotherhood agenda would look like – and who it would be joined with – are open questions.

There are steps that responsible authorities in Egypt (whoever they might be) would be well advised to take to guard against threats to human rights and help develop an enduring democratic system in a new Egypt. Protection of religious minorities is a significant concern after years of tyranny by the Mubarak regime. Christians, so recently the target of a yet another monstrous act of violence in Alexandria, feel insecurity around a transition. The opposition will have to must commit itself to protecting the safety and rights of minorities in Egypt.

In the following series of questions and answers, Human Rights First's Neil Hicks – an expert who has followed Egyptian politics and policies for more than two decades and who has been widely consulted during the events of the past two weeks– assesses some commonly expressed concerns. To speak with Neil about this assessment or others items related to the unfolding events in Egypt, please contact Robyn Lieberman, Senior Advocacy Strategist, at [LiebermanR@HumanRightsFirst.org](mailto:LiebermanR@HumanRightsFirst.org), or 202-370-3316.

## **The Muslim Brotherhood: True or False**

1. ***The Muslim Brotherhood is the largest, most organized opposition group in Egypt.***  
**TRUE**

In its 30 years in office, President Mubarak's government and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) have systematically restricted the development of opposition political parties of all ideological types. Because of its dual identity as both a political movement (although not a political party) and a religious and social movement, the Brotherhood has been able to continue and thrive even when the space for opposition political activity has been restricted. While conventional political parties cannot grow and flourish without a degree of open politics, the Brotherhood can pursue other activities—education, indoctrination and provision of social services—that have permitted it to develop as an organization.

2. ***The Muslim Brotherhood will do well if free elections are held in Egypt for a new parliament in a few months time.*** **TRUE**

While it has been banned from participating in Egyptian elections, from time to time known Brotherhood supporters have been allowed to run for office as independents. They have often done well, notably in the 2005 parliamentary elections when Brotherhood-identified independents gained 88 seats and formed the largest opposition group in parliament. It is clear that the Brotherhood has the capacity to win parliamentary seats. Having said that, an election with the Brotherhood running openly would be different from previous elections, and the calculations of voters would also be different:

- a) Voter participation would likely be much higher in a free election. Historically, voter turnout has been as low as 9%.
  - b) Voters in past elections may have voted for the Brotherhood as a protest, knowing that there was no possibility of it being permitted to form a government or exercise significant influence.
  - c) Conversely, the Brotherhood may have held back from displaying its full electoral power in previous elections so as to avoid reprisals and persecution from the authorities.
  - d) In an open election, the Brotherhood would likely face competition, not only from newly empowered secular opposition parties, long absent from the Egyptian electoral scene, but also from other parties claiming Islam as a guiding force in their politics. Breaking the Brotherhood's monopolistic claim to be the political face of Islam could split the Islamist vote and thereby dilute its electoral power.
3. ***Any government in which the Muslim Brotherhood plays a substantial role would inevitably be a threat to American interests and would seek to abolish the peace treaty with Israel.*** **FALSE**

The Brotherhood will be one among several competing political interests in a new Egyptian government. It is impossible to predict with certainty how political parties might align and

configure in new conditions, but institutions and constituencies that now exist will not disappear. The military appears to be consolidating its already extremely strong influence over Egyptian politics and is likely to hold a de-facto veto power over any government policy, especially in the national security area. The military establishment is unlikely to permit actions that would endanger its close cooperative relations with the U.S. military, and its receipt of \$1.3 billion of foreign military assistance from U.S. tax payers. Newly appointed Vice-President Omer Suleiman has been a close interlocutor with the United States on counterterrorism and national security issues. His role and the policy of cooperation he has carried out would be likely to continue. Similarly, the military would be unlikely to accept an aggressive policy towards Israel that would end U.S. support and cooperation and give Egypt no strategic advantage.

The business community has grown and prospered in recent years and is heavily dependent on foreign investment and integration in the global economy. A new Egyptian government will face the challenge of meeting the heightened expectations of millions of poor people and finding jobs and opportunities for young people who have been at the forefront of the protests. It will need the goodwill of the business community to build a strong economy and sustain economic growth.

**4. *A stronger role for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's government presents a potential threat to women's rights, the rights of religious minorities and basic political freedoms.* TRUE**

The Brotherhood has an ambiguous position on many human rights issues, notably on the rights of women and religious minorities and on freedom of expression. For example, a policy platform that was released in 2007 required that the President of the Republic could not be a woman, and provided for a Council of Islamic scholars who would vet legislation for its compatibility with Islam, following the pattern of the Council of Guardians in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The publication of this regressive platform caused rare open disputes between Brotherhood leaders, some of whom objected strongly to its contents. One can speculate about what the public platform of a free Muslim Brotherhood would include, but there's no question that the tendency of the Brotherhood to arrogate to itself the right to judge what constitutes proper Islamic practice and to condemn practice it finds un-Islamic presents risks to the enjoyment of basic rights and freedoms by many Egyptians. Brotherhood supporters speak of "Islamic democracy;" they note that the overwhelming majority of Egyptians are Muslims (which is true) and that many are pious believers (also true). Some take the leap of suggesting that as the Brotherhood is the party of Islam, they automatically speak for this majority and should therefore prevail. Such thinking is a threat to democratic principles.

To guard against the risk of extremism and the curtailment of rights, a revised Egyptian constitution needs to have strong protection for the principle of non-discrimination as well as robust safeguards for freedom of opinion and expression and other basic freedoms, in accordance with Egypt's obligations in international law. These rights and freedoms must in turn be upheld by a strong, independent judiciary, a strong, independent legislature and other state and private institutions, including a vibrant free press and strong civil society organizations. A new government should ensure that the state education system does not become a vehicle for promoting extremism and hatred of religious minorities.

The Mubarak government has a poor record on many of these core rights and freedoms. Discrimination against Egypt's minority Christian community has been a constant feature of government policy, and the state has often supported censorship of works of art on the ground that they were offensive to religion. The official media and supporters of the ruling party have propagated defamatory rumors against religious minorities that have fueled sectarian tensions, leading to increasing violence against the Copts. The antisemitic content of the official media has also been a cause for concern. There is reason to hope that a new government, even one including the Brotherhood, might do better in these areas.

The formation of a new government in Egypt (and also in Tunisia) in which the Islamist political trend will be included after decades of exclusion and persecution is a major transformation. In some Arab countries, Islamist groups have participated in the electoral process in controlled circumstances, in Jordan and Morocco for example, and their electoral popularity has diminished when faced with the mundane challenges of governance. Egypt now provides an opportunity to put to rest fears about the impact of the participation of Islamist movements in Arab politics on basic freedoms and democracy, but that opportunity is not without risks.

Events in Egypt have their own momentum, properly led by Egyptians themselves. Nonetheless, the U.S. government has a role to play and, given its long-standing, close, friendly bi-lateral relationship, it has an obligation to provide advice and be a voice in support of basic rights and freedoms in Egypt. The U.S. government has been criticized, not least by human rights organizations, for being insufficiently critical of the previous authoritarian government in Egypt for its violations of human rights; it should not make the same mistake again. Supporting the institutions that uphold the rule of law and build a democratic culture is the best safeguard against future threats to Egypt's democratic development from the Muslim Brotherhood or any other party or constituency in the new political landscape that might seek to gain power at the expense of basic rights and freedoms.

## **APPENDIX D, TEN-POINT PLAN FOR COMBATING HATE CRIMES, SUBMITTED BY HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST**

1. Acknowledge and condemn violent hate crimes whenever they occur. Senior government leaders should send immediate, strong, public, and consistent messages that violent crimes which appear to be motivated by prejudice and intolerance will be investigated thoroughly and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
2. Enact laws that expressly address hate crimes. Recognizing the particular harm caused by violent hate crimes, governments should enact laws that establish specific offenses or provide enhanced penalties for violent crimes committed because of the victim's race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, mental and physical disabilities, or other similar status.
3. Strengthen enforcement and prosecute offenders. Governments should ensure that those responsible for hate crimes are held accountable under the law, that the enforcement of hate crime laws is a priority for the criminal justice system, and that the record of their enforcement is well documented and publicized.
4. Provide adequate instructions and resources to law enforcement bodies. Governments should ensure that police and investigators—as the first responders in cases of violent crime—are specifically instructed and have the necessary procedures, resources and training to identify, investigate and register bias motives before the courts, and that prosecutors have been trained to bring evidence of bias motivations and apply the legal measures required to prosecute hate crimes.
5. Undertake parliamentary, interagency or other special inquiries into the problem of hate crimes. Such public, official inquiries should encourage public debate, investigate ways to better respond to hate crimes, and seek creative ways to address the roots of intolerance and discrimination through education and other means.
6. Monitor and report on hate crimes. Governments should maintain official systems of monitoring and public reporting to provide accurate data for informed policy decisions to combat violent hate crimes. Such systems should include anonymous and disaggregated information on bias motivations and/or victim groups, and should monitor incidents and offenses, as well as prosecutions. Governments should consider establishing third party complaint procedures to encourage greater reporting of hate crimes and conducting periodic hate crime victimization surveys to monitor underreporting by victims and underrecording by police.
7. Create and strengthen antidiscrimination bodies. Official antidiscrimination and human rights bodies should have the authority to address hate crimes through monitoring, reporting, and assistance to victims.
8. Reach out to community groups. Governments should conduct outreach and education efforts to communities and civil society groups to reduce fear and assist victims, advance police-

community relations, encourage improved reporting of hate crimes to the police and improve the quality of data collection by law enforcement bodies.

9. Speak out against official intolerance and bigotry. Freedom of speech allows considerable latitude for offensive and hateful speech, but public figures should be held to a higher standard. Members of parliament and local government leaders should be held politically accountable for bigoted words that encourage discrimination and violence and create a climate of fear for minorities.

10. Encourage international cooperation on hate crimes. Governments should support and strengthen the mandates of intergovernmental organizations that are addressing discrimination—like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and the Fundamental Rights Agency—including by encouraging such organizations to raise the capacity of and train police, prosecutors, and judges, as well as other official bodies and civil society groups to combat violent hate crimes. Governments should also provide a detailed accounting on the incidence and nature of hate crimes to these bodies in accordance with relevant commitments.

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## APPENDIX E, STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY IRAQI CHRISTIANS

### **Iraqi Christian (ChaldeanSyriacAssyrian) statement to TLHRC hearing**

The Assyrian Christians (also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs) were among the first nations to convert en mass to Christianity. The Assyrian ancestral lands are in the northern part of present day Iraq, Southern Turkey, North Western Iran and North Eastern Syria. Prior to operation Iraqi Freedom the population of the Assyrian Christian of Iraq is estimated to have been over 1.4 million. As of today, over 700,000 of them are living as refugees in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and because of countless acts of religious discrimination, forced conversions, employment discrimination, kidnappings, rape and murder, a large percentage of the Assyrian Christians still living in Iraq have fled their homes in Basra, Baghdad, Mosul, and smaller metropolitans and have become internally displaced, many of these IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) are living in their ancestral villages and towns of the Nineveh plain and in the Kurdistan region.

Since 2003 over 68 churches have been attacked, bishops and priests kidnapped and killed, student buses bombed and their passengers injured, maimed and killed. The most horrific crime was committed less than 3 months ago inside "Our lady of Salvation" Catholic church in Baghdad where 58 worshipers were brutally murdered leaving 75 injured.

We ask this committee and the rest of the House of Representatives, Senate and the White house to establish an international tribunal to investigate the acts of ethno-religious cleansing being committed against Christian Assyrians and other religious and ethnic minorities throughout Iraq and bring those involved to International justice.

We ask the US people and government to help us establish the 19<sup>th</sup> province in the region known as the Nineveh plain where different ethnic and religious groups have been living in harmony for centuries based on the articles of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Iraq.

We ask the different departments and agencies of the US government to work directly with Assyrian humanitarian organizations already operating in Iraq to alleviate the suffering of the indigenous minorities (i.e. Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq and Hammurabi Human Rights Organization). We also ask this committee and the rest of the Congress to notify our political groups and civic organizations in the US of its intention to hold such meetings in order for us to voice our concerns and become a conduit for the voices of the oppressed religious and ethnic groups in Iraq who have remained voiceless to be heard since they lack the militias and the sponsorship of foreign governments.



IRAQI CHRISTIAN



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