



One Hundred and Fourteenth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

September 12, 2016

Dr. Arely Gomez Gonzalez
Attorney General
Mexico, D.F. – MEXICO

Dear Attorney General Gomez Gonzalez,

We as Members of the United States Congress write to express our grave concern over what appears to be a growing trend of rising intolerance, discrimination and persecution against minority religious communities throughout Mexico, often including the commission of crimes involving local authorities. We urge you to investigate, prosecute and sanction those responsible to the fullest extent of the law.

Article 24 of the Mexican constitution states that “Every man is free to pursue the religious belief that best suits him, and to practice its ceremonies, devotions or cults, as long as they do not constitute a crime.” But in the states of Chiapas, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla, Guerrero, Jalisco and others, non-governmental organizations have documented more than 150 cases of religious persecution committed against primarily minority Protestant communities in recent years, each involving between five and 150 victims. Hundreds of men, women, and children have been expelled from their homes, while many others face constant harassment due to their religious beliefs.

One specific instance of persecution took place in Chiapas on the early morning of Monday, February 15, 2016. A Protestant church in the village of Zinacantan was set ablaze by arsonists, destroying the church and the 200 chairs in which parishioners would worship. This horrible act left hundreds without a place of worship.

While these cases are often reported to the state authorities, the state governments have not protected the rights of minority citizens. Victims have little or no access to legal representation, and in many cases have been forced to sign unlawful agreements that bar them from freely practicing their faith. The failure of state governments to enforce the law by providing redress for victims or prosecuting violators reinforces Mexico’s widespread culture of impunity, and surely contributes to the ongoing abuses.

This culture of impunity also contributes to the rise in violence directed at Catholic priests. According to testimony presented last year before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, more Catholic priests were killed in Mexico in 2014 than in any other country, and 80 percent of cases involving attacks on priests are not resolved.

Attorney General Gomez, when you met with the U.S. Attorney General, Loretta Lynch, you stated that you “want modern, transparent law enforcement that guarantees full respect for human rights...” We applaud your recognition of the need for further protection of Mexico’s citizens and we urge you to fulfill this objective by upholding the Mexican constitution and prosecuting those responsible for the persecution of religious minorities throughout Mexico.

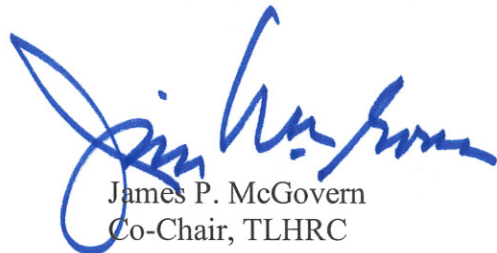
Prosecuting the responsible parties would make clear to the Mexican people that religious persecution will not be tolerated, giving religious minorities a cause for hope. Taking action would also send a signal to the international community that Mexico is serious about protecting religious minorities and abiding by its international commitments, including Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The defense of human rights and religious liberty is essential for maintaining the rule of law and fostering a stable, secure, and economically prosperous Mexico. We ask that you demonstrate your commitment to these goals by ensuring religious freedom for all Mexicans regardless of their creed.

Respectfully,



Joseph R. Pitts
Co-Chair, TLHRC



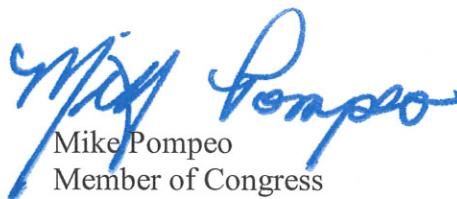
James P. McGovern
Co-Chair, TLHRC



Randy Hultgren
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Mike Pompeo
Member of Congress



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



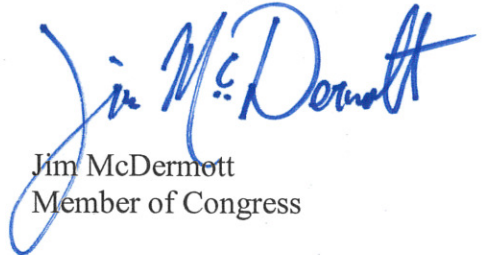
Dave Brat
Member of Congress



Donna F. Edwards
Member of Congress



Bill Johnson
Member of Congress



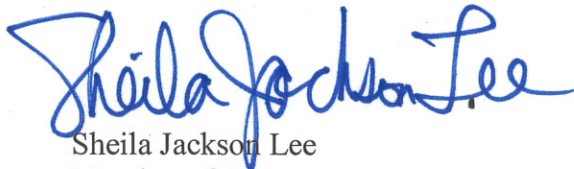
Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Alan S. Lowenthal
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Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress