



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

### **Confronting the Genocide of Religious Minorities: A Way Forward**

**Tuesday, April 19th, 2016**

**2:00 PM - 4:00 PM**

**1334 Longworth House Office Building**

#### **Closing Statement**

Once again, I would like to thank our distinguished panelists for their contributions here today, as well as the other Members of this Commission that attended out of their commitment to combating this genocide.

I distinctly remember serving on the Foreign Affairs Committee in 2004 while we pressed then-Secretary of State Colin Powell to make an accurate designation of genocide for the atrocities being committed in Darfur. Although we received the designation that we believed was warranted, it is only appropriate, given the deteriorating situation in Darfur today, for governments to wonder if everything had been done that was capable of being done. The very reason for this hearing is to have this question addressed so that, decades from now, policymakers can respond in the affirmative. We ask this not for our own sake, but for the sake of the countless victims of the Islamic State's effort to destroy entire groups of people, and for the sake of those that will inevitably be lost if the current state of affairs continues.

In this Commission's hearing a year ago on the human rights violations committed by the Islamic State, Ambassador Saperstein and I had a thoughtful dialogue on the receptivity of foreign populations to our efforts to protect religious minorities. Our government's efforts to preserve international religious freedom are often cast in a light of foreign influence and foreign involvement.

However, this dynamic only supports the high degree of importance that comes with a genocide designation. Inherent in this designation is a call to act. All of the stigmas of foreign involvement fall away. Instead, the only thing that becomes stigmatized is the act of doing nothing.

The call for collective action is at the very heart of the so-called Responsibility to Protect. I believe it is important to note that implicit in that international commitment was a commitment to establishing an early warning capability. For many of those concerned about the state of international freedom in the world, the early warnings were apparent. The treatment of religious minorities in Iraq was one of the main reasons Representative Frank Wolf and so many of us felt the need to legislate on the establishment of a special representative for religious minorities in the Mid-East. The situation on the ground for Christians in Northern Iraq or Sunni tribesmen in Western Iraq was becoming perilous. We advocate for religious freedom, tolerance and human rights amidst these periods of severe escalation to prevent genocide from taking place in the first place.

The Pew Research Center concluded in its latest report in the Latest Trends in Religious Restrictions and Hostilities, 77% of the world's people are living in areas facing high or very high levels of restrictions on religion – up from the two previous years. It's worth noting that the year following that report's reporting period yielded the largest ever increase in terrorism according to the Institute for Economics and Peace.

As we see a path forward for dealing with today's current genocide, we should also actively seek ways of preventing tomorrow's. This Commission will continue to do so, and it is my sincerest hope that the world will follow. The risks of doing nothing are simply too great.