

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 5, 2009

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

As you may know, the Christian community in Iraq has deep spiritual and cultural roots dating back thousands of years. Iraq is referenced many times in the Bible, second only to Israel. It is the land of Abraham and Jonah, of Rebekah and Daniel. Since the first century AD, Iraq has been home to millions of Christians.

Tragically, Iraq's ancient Christian community is facing extinction. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Iraq's Christian population has fallen from as many as 1.4 million in 2003 to between 500,000 and 700,000 at present. USCIRF also reports that "while Christians and other religious minorities represented only approximately 3 percent of the pre-2003 Iraqi population, they constitute approximately 15 and 20 percent of registered Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria, respectively, and Christians account for 35 and 64 percent, respectively, of all registered Iraqi refugees in Lebanon and Turkey."

While the figures above show the effect of the violence upon the Christian community, they also point to a cause. The fact is that a substantial portion of the violence and intimidation that Iraq's Christians and other small, non-Muslim communities have faced is targeted. In July 2008, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration & Refugee Services said this about the minority religious communities:

"These groups, whose home has been what is now Iraq for many centuries, are literally being obliterated not because they are fleeing generalized violence but because they are being specifically and viciously victimized by Islamic extremists and, in some cases, common criminals." An article in Christianity Today by Philip Jenkins described what was happening this way: "What we are seeing then is the death of one of the world's greatest Christian enterprises."

This Administration needs a comprehensive policy to address the situation of these defenseless minorities. We respectfully recommend assigning a high-ranking official at the embassy in Baghdad to handle such matters. We look forward to your thoughts on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Senator Sam Brownback



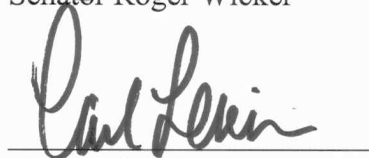
Senator Robert P. Casey Jr.



Senator Roger Wicker



Senator Benjamin Cardin



Senator Carl Levin