

December 4, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U. S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary

We write as American citizens concerned about the vulnerable Christian and Yazidi minorities of Iraq and Syria who are being targeted for eradication in their ancient homelands solely because of their religious beliefs. We respectfully request, on an urgent basis, a meeting with a small delegation who can brief you on the continuing religious genocide confronting both these peoples.

We recently learned that a State Department finding is imminent that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidis. We would wholeheartedly endorse that finding, but we are deeply troubled by the prospect that the Department's statement will either omit or reserve judgment on whether ISIS is committing genocide against Christians.

Two reasons have been given for excluding Christians from the State Department's findings.

- First, we understand that the Department's statement will be based on a limited review of ISIS' actions in Nineveh, Iraq, since the summer of 2014, and that the Department lacks sufficient information about the experience of the Christian communities in Nineveh during that time to conclude that genocide took place. While your office on International Religious Freedom has requested that we provide additional information, it indicated that the final determination of when (or whether) a genocide declaration will be issued concerning Christians will be made at higher levels. We would like the opportunity to explain why the Department's geographic and temporal focus is too narrow, and to present the available evidence of ongoing genocidal acts against Christians in Syria and Iraq at a level where it can be considered before a finding is made.
- Second, a press report by Michael Isikoff indicates that one rationale for excluding Christians is that, unlike Yazidis, ISIS gives Christians a "choice": They can convert to Islam, pay an Islamic tax (*jizya*), or be killed, enslaved, tortured, or held hostage. The implication is that ISIS abides by traditional Islamic Sharia, under which other "People of the Book" (Christians and Jews) pay a tax in exchange for protection by their Muslim rulers. We would like the opportunity to explain why this is emphatically not the case.

The Genocide Convention defines genocide as killing and certain other acts "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." We have extensive files supporting a finding that ISIS' treatment of Iraqi and Syrian Christians, as well as Yazidis and other vulnerable minorities, meets this definition. They include evidence of ISIS assassinations of Church leaders; mass murders; torture, kidnapping for ransom in the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria; its sexual enslavement and systematic rape of Christian girls and women; its practices of forcible conversions to Islam; its destruction of churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and Christian artifacts; and

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its theft of lands and wealth from Christian clergy and laity alike. We will also present ISIS' own, public statements taking "credit" for mass murder of Christians, and expressing its intent to eliminate Christian communities from its "Islamic State".

The world recoiled when it learned that ISIS *ihadis* had stamped Christian homes in Mosul with the red letter "N" for "Nazarene" in summer 2014, but the elimination of Christians in other towns and cities in Iraq and Syria began long beforehand. ISIS genocidal campaign against Christians continues today, with hundreds of Christians remaining in ISIS captivity, and with summary executions, including by beheadings and crucifixions, occurring as recently as only a few months ago.

Pope Francis has called ISIS' crimes against Christians by their proper name: "genocide." The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Christian leaders in the Middle East have done so as well. We agree, and are hopeful that, once you have seen the evidence, you will too.

The United States is rightly viewed the world's leading defender of vulnerable minorities, and as an historic safe-haven for those fleeing religious persecution. A declaration of genocide by the State Department is thus a unique opportunity to bring America's religious communities together to pursue the truth, to support the victims, and to bear witness to the noble principle of "Never Again."

It is, therefore, critically important that the State Department consider the best available evidence before making any official pronouncement that rejects allegations that Christian are, along with Yazidis, targets of ongoing genocidal acts.

We respectfully request that you meet personally at your earliest convenience with a small delegation drawn from those who have signed this letter. We have included point of contact information in a separate attachment.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Carl Anderson
Supreme Knight, Knights of Columbus

His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian
Ecumenical Director and Legate, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)

Robert A. Destro
Professor of Law, The Catholic University of America

Most Reverend Bishop Julian Dobbs
Missionary Bishop of Convocation of Anglicans in North America

Dr. Thomas F. Farr
Director Religious Freedom Project, Georgetown University

Robert P. George
McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University

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Ambassador Mary Ann Glendon
Harvard Law School

Aram Hamparian
Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America

Shirley V. Hoogstra, J.D.
President, Council For Christian Colleges & Universities

Harry R. Jackson, Jr.
Pastor, Hope Christian Church
Bishop, International Communion of Evangelical Churches

Most Reverend Sarhad Y. Jammo
Chaldean Bishop of Western U.S.A.

Philip Jenkins
Distinguished Professor of History, Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University

Brian Katulis
Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

Rev. Benedict Kiely
Founder, www.Nasarean.org

The Very Reverend James A. Kowalski
Dean of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine

Most Reverend Gregory Mansour
Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn

R. Albert Mohler Jr.
President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Rev. Johnnie Moore
President, The KAIROS Company
Author, *Defying ISIS*

Russell Moore
President, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Mark L. Movsesian
Frederick A. Whitney Professor and Director, Center for Law and Religion
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Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou
Assoc. Prof. of Conflict Resolution, The Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, Tufts University

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Rev. Bob Roberts, Jr.
Senior Pastor, NorthWood Church, Keller, TX

Rev. Dr. Samuel Rodriguez
President, NHCLC/CONELA, Hispanic Evangelical Association

Nina Shea
Director and Senior Scholar, Center for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute

Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett
President, Lantos Foundation

Very Rev. Nathanael Symeonides
Ecumenical & Interfaith Officer, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Frank Wolf
Distinguished Senior Fellow of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative;
Wilson Chair in Religious Freedom, Baylor University

Dr. George O. Wood
General Superintendent, Assemblies of God, USA

Cardinal Donald Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington

Attachment (1): Point of contact information.

cc: Hon. Anthony Blinken, Deputy Secretary of State
Hon. Sarah Sewall, Undersecretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights
Hon. Elizabeth Bagley, Senior Advisor for Special Initiatives to the Secretary
Hon. David Saperstein, Ambassador for International Religious Freedom
Hon. Ira Forman, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism
Dr. Shaun Casey, Special Advisor for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

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ATTACHMENT 1

Point of Contact Information:

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