

Committee on International Justice and Peace

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October 27, 2011

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Committee of International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to urge timely action on HR 2867, legislation to reauthorize the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), before its expiration on November 18, 2011. The USCCB worked actively to establish this important Commission and supports its reauthorization since it plays a vital role in preserving human dignity and human rights around the globe by monitoring and promoting religious freedom.

Ongoing attacks against Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and in other parts of the world point to the need to pay more, not less, attention to religious freedom. Violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt, the Christmas Eve bombings of Christian churches in Nigeria, last October's attack on worshipers at the Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad, and other heinous acts are grim reminders of what is at stake.

Today the mission of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom is more important than ever. An independent bipartisan federal commission, USCIRF monitors the status of religious freedom and provides essential information concerning persecution and violations of human rights throughout the world. In addition, it plays a significant role is raising the profile of religious freedom around the globe.

Although our Conference does not have a position on every provision in the legislation, we strongly support the inclusion of term limits and bringing H.R. 2867 to the floor of the Senate for a vote. Abolition of this body would send an unintended message to the rest of the world. Oppressive groups may come to believe that the United States is not committed to the protection of religious liberty.

Religious freedom, rooted in the dignity of the human person, is "a cornerstone of the structure of human rights." Pope Benedict XVI devoted his 2011 World Day of Peace message to religious freedom, calling it the "path to peace." The free exercise of religion contributes to "the building of a just and peaceful social order."

The Catholic Church has long raised concerns regarding religious liberty throughout the world, defending members of all religions. Our Conference was deeply involved in the process that led to the creation of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. We urge you to support passage of HR 2867 before November 18, 2001, lest a critically important tool in the preservation of religious freedom is lost.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard

Bishop of Albany

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace