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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

January 8, 2009

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The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW Ste 7276
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Dear Secretary Rice:

Millions around the world just celebrated Christmas. In churches and homes throughout our own country children learned of Mary, Joseph, a census, a stable---of Nazareth and Bethlehem and other far away places. These lands of old that are found throughout the Bible are still home to ancient Christian communities with deep spiritual and cultural roots. In fact, with the exception of Israel, the Bible contains more references to the cities, regions and nations of ancient Iraq than any other country.

The patriarch Abraham came from a city in Iraq called Ur. Isaac's bride, Rebekah, came from northwest Iraq. Jacob spent 20 years in Iraq and his sons (the 12 tribes of Israel) were born in northwest Iraq. A remarkable spiritual revival as told in the book of Jonah occurred in Nineveh. The events of the book of Esther took place in Iraq as did the account of Daniel in the Lion's Den.

Tragically Iraq's ancient Christian community is facing extinction on this administration's watch. 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."

It is critical to note, as the figures above indicate, that the violence and intimidation that Iraq's Christians and other ethno-religious 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."

We need a comprehensive policy or even a point person at the embassy in Baghdad to address the unique situation of these defenseless minorities. 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."

I urge you, in your final days as secretary of State, to take dramatic action on behalf of this hurting population and a good starting point is the recent recommendations put forward by USCIRF. I respectfully request a response from you, rather than the assistant secretary for Legislative Affairs.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

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