

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 23, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Members of Congress are intensely concerned by the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This brutal terrorist group threatens the national security of the United States as well as our allies and partners and has created a humanitarian catastrophe in Iraq and Syria. In multiple hearings, the Committee on Foreign Affairs has focused on the murderous campaign by ISIL to eliminate religious and ethnic minorities from the territory it controls. The Committee has heard from experts and survivors about ISIL's campaign to destroy communities through mass murder, rape, sexual enslavement, torture, and the obliteration of ancient churches, shrines, and cultural sites.

Of note, when asked at a November 4, 2015 Foreign Affairs Committee hearing whether genocide is occurring in the Middle East, Assistant Secretary of State Anne Patterson did not present a view, but stated that "there will be some announcements on that very shortly." The Committee has been seeking additional information from the Department of State since, but has received none.

As you know, the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, signed and ratified by the United States, defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

On December 7, on the basis of that definition, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) "call[ed] on the U.S. government to designate the Christian, Yazidi, Shi'a, Turkmen, and Shabak communities of Iraq and Syria as victims of genocide by ISIL." To date, that call has gone unanswered.

We are gravely concerned by persistent press reports that the Administration is preparing a genocide finding that would apply only to Yazidis, and may avoid judgment about whether ISIL is also committing genocide against Christians and the other minorities it is eliminating. This would be contrary to the USCIRF finding, as well as a prominent member of the Yazidi community who testified before Congress last week that: "The Yazidis and Chaldo-Assyrian Christians face this genocide together." While it is hardly possible to overstate the brutality of ISIL's attempts to destroy the Yazidis, an overly narrow finding would wrongly

discount similar violence directed against other minorities in the region, with likely dire consequences for those minorities.

Indeed, ISIL has ripped gaping holes in the ancient cultural tapestry of the Middle East. In her testimony before the Foreign Affairs Committee earlier this year, Dominican Sister Diana Momeka, whose convent was driven out of Mosul, stated starkly that today “the only Christians that remain in the Plain of Nineveh are those who are held as hostages.” At the hands of ISIL, Christians and other minorities have faced mass murder, crucifixions, sexual slavery, torture, beheadings, the kidnapping of children, and other violence deliberately calculated to eliminate their communities from the so-called Islamic State.

Any genocide determination must reflect the full reality of the situation based on the best evidence available. Thirty prominent religious leaders and experts, many with deep ties to the region, wrote to you on December 4. They requested the opportunity to meet and provide you with extensive, detailed evidence regarding the fate of Christian communities under ISIL. In particular, they asked for the opportunity to demonstrate why the Administration's reported misperception that Christians have the “choice” to live by paying ISIL a protection tax (*jizya*) is “emphatically not the case.” We urge the Department of State to promptly acknowledge and accept this critical offer.

An official genocide determination by the Administration is a rare and weighty occasion – one that should include thorough consultation with Congress. As Members of Congress, we will continue to insist that any genocide finding must reflect the actual experience of all minorities whose communities are being erased and whose families are being slaughtered because of their faith.

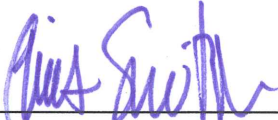
Sincerely,



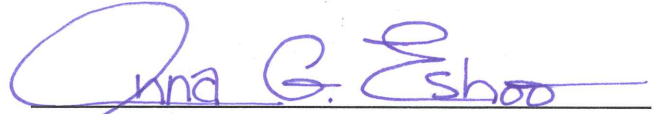
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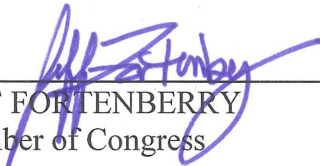
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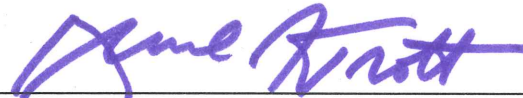
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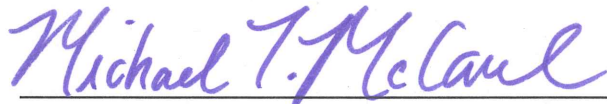
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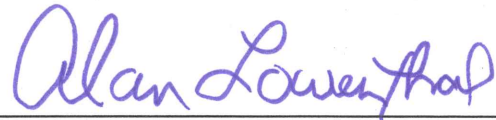
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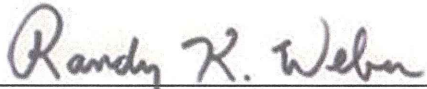
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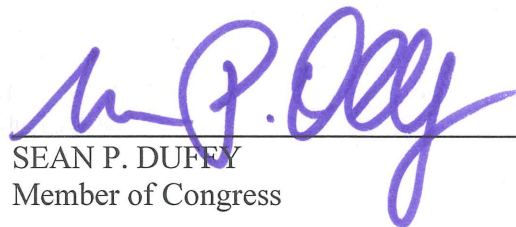
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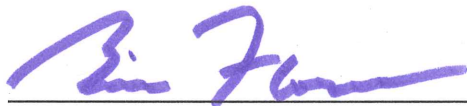
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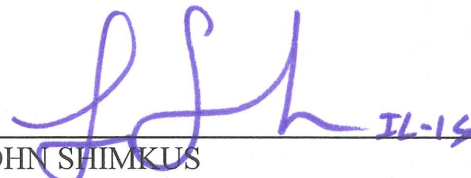
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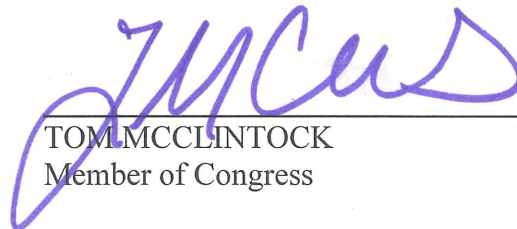
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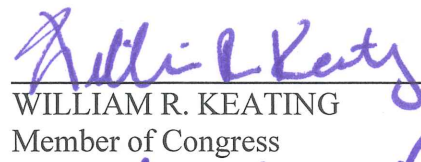


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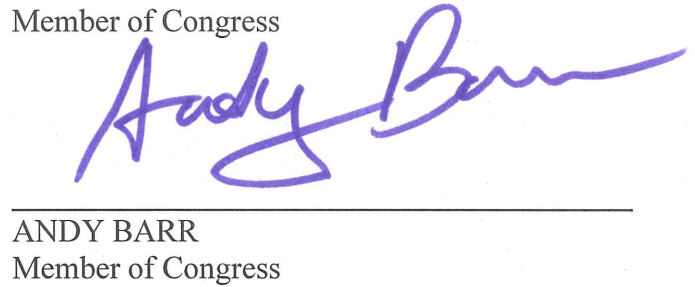


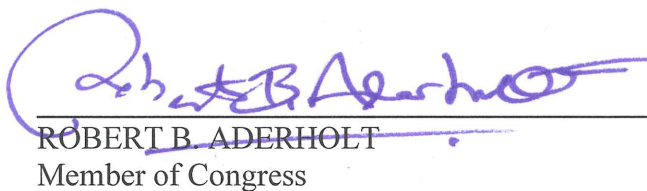
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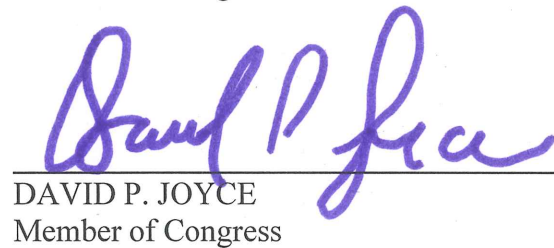

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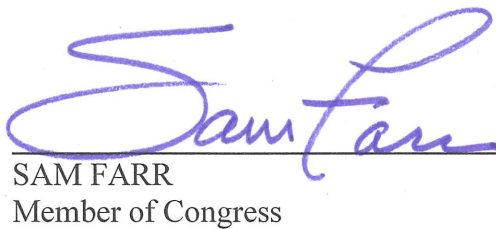

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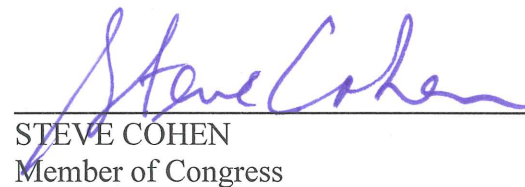

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