



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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January 6, 2010

The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

Recent attacks against Christians in Egypt, Iraq and Nigeria as well as other countries over Christmas and New Year highlight an appalling trend of increased violence aimed at vulnerable minority communities unable to protect themselves. In Egypt, the New Year's Day bombing of a Coptic Church that killed over 20 people and injured over a 100 shocked many because it was an unprecedented attack on worshippers in a sacred building. The Coptic Church called the bombing "a grave escalation" of violence against Christians.

In Iraq, the Church is still recovering from the October 31 attack on a Syrian-Catholic cathedral in Baghdad that claimed the lives of over 60. Christmas saw continued targeting, on a smaller scale, of Iraqi Christians, their homes and property, and more have either died or lost all of their possessions. In Nigeria, churches have been bombed in various northern towns, resulting in over 80 deaths. In a statement, the Christian Association of Nigeria said, "these acts of violence and arson against peace loving and law abiding Christians and our churches . . . must stop now."

Pope Benedict XVI, in his New Year's Day message, noted the "threatening tensions of the moment, especially in the face of discrimination, of abuse of power and religious intolerance that today particularly strikes Christians," and called for world leaders to make a "concrete and constant commitment" to help bring peace. It is only by respecting the dignity of every human person, that the foundation for the rule of law and for peaceful coexistence can be established.

The United States has long seen itself as a major proponent of human rights and defender of religious freedom. We believe that egregious violations of human rights as well as indifference and inaction by foreign governments to the protection of their own citizens must be weighed seriously by the current administration as it makes economic and political decisions that impact these states.

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I ask that the Department of State, through its various bureaus and especially its Office of International Religious Freedom, to raise with other governments the need to better protect the human rights, including religious freedom, for vulnerable minorities, especially Christians.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace