

Testimony of
Mr. Carl A. Anderson

Supreme Knight
Knights of Columbus

Before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and International Organizations
of the
House Foreign Affairs Committee

At a hearing titled
*Fulfilling the Humanitarian Imperative:
Assisting Victims of ISIS Violence*

December 9, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee and discuss the Knights of Columbus humanitarian aid programs. Over the course of the past year, our programs have helped feed, heal, shelter and educate many thousands of desperate Christians in church-run camps or other private places of refuge in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. We have established a donation and news web portal titled **Christiansatrisk.org** and have to date donated over \$5 million in direct aid to Christians and other persecuted minorities in the region. We have partnered with other organizations in the region, including Catholic Relief Services, Aid to the Church in Need, Caritas, and local dioceses in Iraq and Syria.

Our assistance has taken the form of food, shelter, education and medical assistance. At times it has required exceptional care: for example, several weeks ago we helped Katreena, a very sick 15 year-old Iraqi girl by organizing her airlift from a displaced persons camp in Erbil, Kurdistan. Her life was saved when she was brought to a New England hospital for treatment for numerous issues that could not adequately be addressed in Iraq.

Through this humanitarian work in the Middle East we have made three basic observations and four recommendations bearing on U.S. human rights and refugee policy that I would like to focus on in my testimony today. In the interests of time, I will summarize them briefly at the outset:

1. The Christian communities of Iraq and Syria, along with those of other vulnerable religious minorities, are suffering genocide that continues to the present time. We recommend, therefore, that Congress adopt House Concurrent Resolution 75, which names and decries the ongoing “genocide” against Christians and other vulnerable minorities in Iraq and Syria. Introduced by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry and Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, this resolution has 153 cosponsors and a similar resolution is soon to be introduced in the Senate.
2. We further recommend that the U.S. State Department publicly acknowledge that genocide is taking place against the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria, including in its reportedly impending statement on genocide that, according to reports, refers only to Nineveh’s Yazidi community. The United States is rightly viewed as the world’s leading defender of vulnerable minorities, and it is critically important that the State Department consider the best available evidence before issuing a statement that would exclude Christians. An official government declaration of genocide is an opportunity to bring America’s religious communities together to pursue the truth, to support victims, and to bear witness to the noble principle of “Never Again.”

Last week the Knights of Columbus sent an urgent letter to Secretary of State John Kerry asking for an opportunity to brief him about this genocide. This letter was signed by Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, and two dozen other religious leaders and scholars from across the political spectrum

and from diverse Orthodox, Protestant, Mormon, as well as Catholic, faith traditions. A copy of the letter is attached to this testimony as an addendum

3. The Christian communities of Iraq and Syria, along with those of other vulnerable religious minorities, fear taking shelter in the camps of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) because of religiously motivated violence and intimidation inside the camps. We recommend that the United States insist on proper security inside the camps and identify ways to ensure that Christians and other vulnerable minorities from Iraq and Syria are not subject to violence inside UNHCR facilities, including the possibility of providing separate facilities for minorities and hiring professional staff that would include members of the minority communities. The U.S. should require the UNHCR to gather and make public, along with its other data, the religious affiliation of all the refugees it serves. To ignore reports of humanitarian problems, without prompt investigation and corrective action, is itself an injustice.
4. Syrian Christians and other vulnerable minorities are disproportionately excluded from the U.S. Syrian Refugee Resettlement Program due to reliance on a functionally discriminatory UNHCR program. We recommend that the U.S. government take immediate action to implement its stated policy of “prioritizing” the resettlement of vulnerable minorities, including Christians. In addition, we recommend that the U.S. government end its sole reliance on the UNHCR for refugee referrals and engage private contractors to identify, document and refer Christian, Yazidi and other vulnerable minority refugees from Syria and Iraq who are in need of resettlement.

A Genocide Targeting the Christians

The near-complete dependency of these refugees on our help and that of other private charities to meet their essential needs will continue for the foreseeable future. Fear of being slaughtered or enslaved for their faith prevents them from returning home. Like the region’s other refugee communities, the vulnerable Christian minority is striving to survive devastating conflicts – in which, it should be noted, the Christian communities have not taken up arms for any side. In addition, like the Jews in Nazi Germany, these Christians are escaping genocide. They are being specifically targeted because they put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis has been in the forefront in calling attention to this ongoing attempt at extermination. About these Christians, he declared that “a form of genocide — and I stress the word ‘genocide’ — is taking place, and it must end.”¹ The Knights of Columbus believes this is the proper name for what has been confronting these churches and, in our media advocacy campaign, we have urged others – including this

¹ <http://www.france24.com/en/20150710-bolivia-pope-francis-calls-end-genocide-christians-middle-east>

Congress – to also recognize that these and other vulnerable minorities from the killing fields of Iraq and Syria are suffering genocide, the most egregious of human rights transgressions.

Last week, the Knights of Columbus sent an urgent letter to Secretary of State John Kerry asking for an opportunity to brief him about this genocide. This letter was signed by Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, and two dozen other religious leaders and scholars from across the political spectrum and from diverse Orthodox, Protestant, Mormon, as well as Catholic, faith traditions. These signatories united in response to reports that the State Department will soon issue a statement on genocide in the region that, while rightly providing a focus on the Yazidi community, unjustifiably excludes the Christians. A copy of this letter is attached to this testimony as an addendum.

Our coalition's letter of December 4th observes that 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." As we then explained:

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 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."

Three days after our letter to Secretary of State Kerry, the independent United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) issued a statement calling upon the U.S. government to designate Christians and other religious minorities of Iraq and Syria as victims of genocide.² But we have not received any response from Secretary Kerry or others with the State Department.

We emphasize, the genocidal attacks against Christians began years before ISIS emerged from Al Qaeda in Iraq and before the summer of 2014, when ISIS began stamping Christian homes in Mosul for confiscation with the red letter "N" for "Nazarene."³ In March 2007, the leader of the group that would spawn ISIS officially articulated the jihadist intent to kill Christians as legitimate targets of war: "We find that the sects of the People of the Book and others from the Sabians and so in the State of Islam today are people of war who qualify for no protection, for they have transgressed against whatever they agreed to in many countless ways, and if they want peace and

² <http://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/press-releases/uscifr-statement-the-designation-victims-genocide-persecution-and-crimes>

³ <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/8721.htm>

security then they must start a new era with the State of Islam according to (Caliph) Omar's stipulations [the historic "Covenant" of Caliph Omar with Christians] that they have annulled." The Knights of Columbus interviewed Fr. Douglas Bazi, who currently runs a Church-based refugee camp in Erbil. Fr. Bazi was himself kidnapped and tortured by Islamic extremists in 2009 even prior to the current insurgency. Fr. Bazi has said, "Genocide is an easy word compared to what is happening to my people."⁴

The attacks against Christians continue to the present day, as shown in just a few examples which follow:

- In October 2015, ISIS released a video of the point-blank execution in the previous month of three Assyrian Christian men in orange jumpsuits. They were from the group of some 250 hostages taken captive in February 2015 from undefended Christian villages along Syria's Khabour river. ISIS is threatening to execute others from the group unless a staggering \$10 million ransom is paid. Greek Melkite Catholic Archbishop Jean-Clement Jeanbart stated in Fall 2015 that some one thousand Christians had been kidnapped and murdered in his city of Aleppo, alone. Since 2003, so many thousands of Iraqi and Syrian Christians have been held hostage for ransom that Christians there are sometimes referred to as "currency" and such ransoms are cited by experts as a major source of ISIS' revenues. One victim was Chaldean priest Douglas Bazi, featured in our recent television commercial aired on Fox, who now manages Erbil's Mar Elia camp for 100 displaced Christian families. Like many others, Fr. Bazi was severely tortured while a captive. On July 10, 2015, the Vatican press *Fides* reported that, after their families pay ransoms of up to \$50,000, Christian hostages in Baghdad are now being killed instead of freed.
- The US-based Christian Aid Mission reported on its website the rape, beheading and crucifixion on August 28 in villages outside Aleppo, of eleven Christian preachers, including the 12-year-old son of one of them, and two women, because they refused to renounce their faith. These were evangelical Christians converted from Islam, but many Catholics and Orthodox have also suffered horrific ordeals. At least three Christians have been kidnapped and sold in a Mosul slave market and remain enslaved, including three year-old Christina Noah, whose mother was interviewed by former Congressman Frank Wolf. ISIS explicitly announced its approval of the sexual enslavement of Christian women and girls in its magazine *Dabiq*. Numerous clergy including a Catholic bishop in Mosul and two Orthodox bishops in Aleppo, have been assassinated simply for their faithfulness. The pectoral cross of one Iraqi Chaldean Catholic priest, Father Ragheed Ganni, whose throat was slit by Islamic radicals in 2007 when he refused to close his church in Mosul, is now sometimes worn by Pope Francis.

⁴ Fr. Bazi also told the Knights of Columbus: "What's the point of letting sheep among wolves? Be our voice. I will not be surprised if they are going to destroy us, but I will be disappointed if no one will tell our stories... I will ask you here: pray for my people, help my people, and save my people. And I believe you can."

- On July 6, 2015, ISIS blew up the historic 1,000-year old church in Mosul known as the Church of the Mother of Perpetual Help. In mid-2015, Mosul's historic St. Joseph's Catholic Church was converted into a mosque, with its cross removed and gold dome painted black. St. Ephrem's Cathedral, the seat of the Syrian Orthodox archdiocese, was turned into the Mosque of the Mujahideen, reported the Vatican around the same time. In March 2015, ISIS tweeted photos showing the group blowing up the 4th century Mar Behnam Monastery in Qaraqosh, Nineveh. The monastery was known to contain one of the most valuable Syriac libraries in Iraq. Photos also showed the group's bombing of the tombs of Saint Behnam and Saint Sarah, both believed by the faithful to have been converted to Christianity by Saint Matthew. The 5th century Mar Elian monastery in Qaryatain was bulldozed by ISIS in August. ISIS's destruction of churches, monasteries and convents in the territory it controls has been systematic. But this pattern began a decade before and included the widely publicized attack on Our Lady of Perpetual Help (also called Our Lady of Salvation), a Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad, in October 2010; it was filled with worshippers celebrating holy Mass, killing about 50 of them, including two priests. In addition to eradicating Christian people, the extremists' goal is to erase every trace of Christianity's two thousand year old presence.

Untold numbers of other atrocities have been documented by a variety of Church and private sources. In the interest of time, I provide only these illustrative few.

We are aware that one rationale for excluding Christians is that, unlike Yazidis, ISIS gives Christians a "choice": they can convert to Islam or pay an Islamic tax (jizya), rather than being killed or enslaved. 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. As we wrote to Secretary Kerry and as the facts show, this is emphatically not the case.

Many times the payment of jizya is not presented as an option for these Christians. In the instances where the jizya has been exacted, it has failed to ensure that the Christians could live as Christians, that they were protected from rival jihadists or even other members of ISIS, or that the amount of the payment was not raised over time until it became an impossible sum, causing the family's home and even children to be confiscated and the adults killed or forced to become Muslims. A Dutch journalist reported just such an incident in *Idlib* in 2013 when a number of Christian families began to pay the jizya but, after the amount demanded kept increasing over several months, some Christians decided to flee, leaving behind their farms and property, while others who could not pay or escape were forced to convert to Islam. In the Christian valley outside Homs, an Orthodox priest reported that those who couldn't pay the jizya and who were not able to flee were killed. In some places, ISIS rulers reportedly demand that the jizya be paid in gold, a tax that would be impossible to sustain. Middle East scholar and, until earlier this year, the coordinator of U.S. government ideological

counterterrorism messaging, Alberto Fernandez, writing in a study for *MEMRI*⁵, noted the absence of any open church or evidence of Christian life in Raqqa, where the jizya contract was reportedly drawn up between ISIS and local Christians. He found ISIS jizya to be “a Salafi Caliphate publicity stunt.” It should be needless to state that being forced to convert to Islam, under penalty of death or sexual enslavement, is evidence of religious genocide, not an alternative to it.

Today any Christian who was not able to flee when ISIS took control of their area has been killed, taken captive, enslaved, or forced to live as a Muslim. There, no holy Masses or other forms of Christian worship are tolerated and its two thousand year old Christian culture and communities have been effectively eradicated.

Christians and Other Vulnerable Religious Minority Refugees Fear UNHCR Camps:

The aid of private charitable organizations such as the Knights of Columbus is essential because Iraqi and Syrian Christians and other displaced vulnerable minorities, while justifiably afraid of returning home, avoid seeking refuge in UNHCR camps. The overwhelming majority of Christian families are seeking shelter, food and medicine from Church-operated camps like Father Douglas Bazi’s Mar Elia camp, or living with relatives or in apartments and make-shift shelters in the slum areas of Amman and Beirut, apart from the UNHCR camps. They have no right to work, own property or drive a car in these areas and depend on support from local churches and a variety of international governmental and non-governmental sources. Far too little attention has been given to a disturbing reason for why Christians don’t seek shelter in UNHCR camps and its implications.

This pattern of avoiding the UN camps first became apparent in Iraqi Kurdistan when the Christians fled Mosul on June 10, 2014, and continues to hold true today for the displaced Christian minorities in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as in Kurdistan. Neither in the large UNHCR Zaatari and Azraq camps in Jordan, which together shelter over 100,000 mostly Syrian refugees, nor in its smaller encampments in Lebanon, did recent visitors find a single Christian refugee family sheltering there.

The United States government is the world’s most generous donor to the UNHCR and resettles more refugees from it “than all other resettlement countries combined,” according to the department’s Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration.⁶ However, despite deep US investment in the UNHCR refugee program, our government has given scant focus to the consistent, region-wide, and frankly shocking pattern that the most vulnerable religious minority refugees overwhelmingly avoid the UNHCR camps. In fact, it has been largely silent about the matter and strangely lacking in curiosity about the underlying explanation. Its response has been virtually limited to a

⁵ <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/8721.htm>

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/>

brief, unclassified official email statement which said, “many minority religious groups from Syria are urban refugees and have not entered the UN system.”⁷

The UNHCR, itself, seems to dodge the question, implying that it is unaware of any such issue. It is able to provide age and gender breakdowns but not religious affiliation of those in its camps, despite the fact that a well-founded fear of “religious persecution” is a fundamental issue for determining refugee status under international law and, given the intense religious persecution of the minorities, this should be one of the first questions asked of those seeking shelter in its camps. On December 2, a media report stated: “Queries sent to the UNHCR about the religious breakdown of refugees in its camps, and about Christians’ concerns about their safety, have yet to bring a response.”⁸ A second query put to the UNHCR by a U.S. senate office also failed to receive a response.

The reason that the Christians and other vulnerable religious minorities stay away from UNHCR camps can be found in interviews with those who work with the minority refugees and others who’ve been inside the UNHCR camps. The UK’s Lord David Alton is one who has spoken out about this, stating last month that many minorities escaping Syria have either fled the UNHCR refugee camps or have never risked entering them “because they suffer attacks, inside the camps, by radical Islamists.”⁹ He reported on the testimony of a witness in an ongoing British parliamentary investigation into this scandal as follows:

The House of Commons International Development Select Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the Syrian Refugee Crisis. At an evidence session recently, a witness, speaking on behalf of an organisation which works in the region directly with refugees, gave testimony that “we are not aware of Christians being within UN registered camps” – the camps to which UK Aid makes a substantial funding contribution. The Committee was told that Christians avoid these camps – and therefore access to the support within them – because of fear: “if your culture is different, you stand out and are more of a target, which makes you nervous to go there.”

Lord Alton stated further:

Another witness in written evidence to the inquiry states, “Christians are generally not able to go to camps for fear of intimidation and risk...Because many Christians and other minority groups do not enter the camps due to fear of

⁷ Unclassified email of October 27, 2015, from Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Middle East Knox Thames to Nina Shea, Director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom.

⁸ <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/state-dept-us-refugee-program-admits-most-vulnerable> .

⁹ <http://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2015/11/fiona-bruce-mp-and-lord-alton-our-aid-programme-must-support-religious-freedom.html>

religious persecution, this would result in them being doubly disadvantaged as they will not have equal access to the scheme.” This double disadvantage refers to effective exclusion from the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme – after having already been driven away from their home towns or villages, often as a result of religious persecution – these refugees, surviving outside the UN camps, have no chance of being selected as some of the 20,000 refugees the UK has committed to welcome here. An Archbishop familiar with the region says that if they are outside the refugee camps “[t]he UN don’t really help these families.”

Hudson Institute’s international religious freedom scholar Nina Shea interviewed representatives of the Charlottesville, Virginia-based Christian Aid Mission, who visited the UNHCR camps in Jordan to bring food and medicine parcels and found them to be “dangerous” places where ISIS, militias, and gangs traffic in women and threaten men who refuse to swear allegiance to the caliphate. One of its associates from the region told her that even UNHCR offices in the capital cities, which are staffed with locals, mostly from the majority religion, can be intimidating for Christians. Reportedly when one Christian family that escaped ISIS attested to being persecuted for religious reasons, the staff angrily argued back that “Christians are the ones persecuting Muslims.”

The Christian Aid Mission provides further details about hostility inside the UNHCR camps in its release interviewing one of its indigenous mission directors. Posted on its website¹⁰, excerpts follow:

In United Nations camps in Jordan, Islamist gangs bring the same practices that refugees have fled: coercion to join terrorist groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS), conflict between militias on both sides of the civil war, and the criminal buying and selling of females as sex slaves.

"The Muslim gangs come as refugees, but they have their agendas," said the ministry director, whose name is withheld for security reasons. "They're like a mafia. People are even killed inside the camps, and the refugees are afraid to say if they saw somebody get killed. If you ask them, they'll say, 'I don't know, I was asleep.'"U.N. refugee camps offer little refuge, he said. "The last time I went inside a camp, I had a policeman with me," the ministry director said. "The camps are dangerous because they have ISIS, Iraqi militias and Syrian militias. It's another place for gangs. They're killing inside the camps, and they're buying and selling ladies and even girls." Inside the camps, ISIS treats the men much as they do in Syria – telling them that they will either swear allegiance to the caliphate or be killed, he said. ISIS militants try to do in secret what they did openly in Syria.

¹⁰ http://www.christianaid.org/mobi/news/2015/mir20151008_full.aspx

In the British newspaper *Express*, a terrorist defector asserted that ISIS is sending “teams of trained killers into camps disguised as refugees to kidnap and kill vulnerable Christians.”¹¹

These reports raise a humanitarian and security problem so severe they should not be ignored any longer. If confirmed, this would mean that some American aid is going toward the support of ISIS and other extremists and toward the fostering of an environment inside purported camps of refuge that intimidates and oppresses all their residents, whether they are a minority or not. It also means that this U.S. support of Iraqi and Syrian refugees is largely bypassing the Christian and other vulnerable minority refugees. And, as Lord Alton pointed out, these are the camps from which the West, including the U.S., will be accepting tens of thousands of Syrian refugees for resettlement, thus posing potentially a serious security risk to the homeland. These camps need improved oversight and security.

Syrian Christians and Other Vulnerable Minorities Are Disproportionately Excluded from the U.S. Syrian Refugee Resettlement Program Due to Reliance on a Functionally Discriminatory UNHCR Program

Another implication of being forced to shelter outside the UNHCR system is that the Christians, Yazidis and other vulnerable religious minorities are thus disproportionately excluded from the UN refugee resettlement referrals to the United States and other Western countries. This is borne out in US State Department public data which shows that, since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, cumulatively only about 2.5% of the Syrian refugees resettled through the UNHCR in the United States have been Christians, though Christians comprised 10% of the Syrian pre-war population of 2 million and are facing religious genocide.¹² During this 5-year period, only one lone Yazidi has been resettled in the U.S. through the UNHCR though there were 800,000 Yazidis in pre-war Syria and that vulnerable minority community, too, suffers religious genocide.

Since the Paris terror attacks on November 13, the State Department has admitted 237 Syrian refugees into the United States – 236 Sunni Muslims and one Christian, according to data from the State Department Refugee Processing Center.¹³ This is structural discrimination against some of the neediest refugees, and it is shameful.

The administration continues to claim that it is U.S. policy to give “priority resettlement” to Syrian Christian and Yazidi refugees. “Due to the unique needs of

¹¹ <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/614249/ISIS-sends-ASSASSINS-UN-refugee-camps-could-come-Britain>

¹² <http://www.hudson.org/research/11861-christian-syrian-refugees-united-states-won-t-admit-non-muslims>

¹³ <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/04-christian-syrian-refugees-admitted-paris-attacks-include-236>

vulnerable religious minority communities, the State Department has prioritized the resettlement of Syrian Christian refugees and other religious minorities fleeing the conflict,” wrote the Department’s Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Middle East Knox Thames to Shea in the unclassified, official State Department statement. This issue is consequential: The administration is committed to accepting 10,000 refugees from Syria in the coming months, a five-fold increase over the number we have resettled over the last five years combined. Nevertheless, few of these can be expected from the Christian and minority communities as long as the U.S. government relies on a UNHCR refugee referral process that functionally excludes them and as long as administration and congressional leaders remain apathetic about this injustice.

Pope Francis has highlighted the need for the West to include the Christian minority refugees in its welcome of Syrian refugees. In a dramatic gesture, on September 6, the Holy Father, personally, gave refuge inside the Vatican to a Melkite Greek Catholic family from Damascus. The pope has urged others to follow this example.

In light of the foregoing discussion, the Knights of Columbus proposes the following recommendations to ensure this and other guarantees of basic fairness are given effect:

Recommendations:

1. Congress, including the House of Representatives, should urgently adopt a resolution recognizing that the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria, as well as other vulnerable communities are facing genocide. The Knights of Columbus supports House Concurrent Resolution 75, which names and decries the ongoing “genocide” against Christians and other vulnerable minorities in Iraq and in Syria. Introduced by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry and Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, this resolution already has 153 bipartisan cosponsors and a similar resolution is to be soon introduced in the Senate.
2. In addition, the U.S. government should publicly acknowledge that genocide is taking place against the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria, including in its reportedly impending statement on genocide that, according to reports, refers only to Nineveh’s Yazidi community. It is 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. 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. An official government declaration of genocide is 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.”

3. As the most generous state both in supporting the UNHCR and in accepting for resettlement refugees referred by it, the United States has a heavy obligation and considerable ability to ensure that places of refuge operated by the UNHCR welcome and provide sanctuary to members of all faiths, including Christians and other vulnerable minorities. It should insist on proper security inside the camps and identify ways to ensure that Christian and other vulnerable minorities from Iraq and Syria are not subject to violence and intimidation inside UNHCR facilities, including possibly by providing separate facilities for minorities and by hiring more professional staffing, including members of the minority communities. The U.S. should require the UNHCR to gather and make public, along with its other data, the religious affiliation of all the refugees it serves. To ignore reports of such humanitarian problems, without prompt investigation and corrective action, would itself be an injustice.
4. The U.S. government should ensure that Christians and other vulnerable minorities are not structurally discriminated against in the U.S. refugee resettlement of ten thousand Syrians during the current fiscal year. Moreover, it should take immediate action to implement its stated policy of “prioritizing” the resettlement of vulnerable minorities, including Christians. The U.S. government should end its sole reliance on the UNHCR for refugee referrals, and engage private contractors to identify, document and refer Christian, Yazidi and other vulnerable minority refugees from Syria and Iraq who are in need of resettlement.

ADDENDUM

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

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Rev. Benedict Kiely
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The Very Reverend James A. Kowalski
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Most Reverend Gregory Mansour
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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

ATTACHMENT 1

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