

112TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. RES. 732

Calling for the protection of the rights and freedoms of religious minorities
in the Arab world.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 17, 2012

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona (for himself, Mr. SHERMAN, Mr. WOLF, Mr. PITTS, Mr. CONNOLLY of Virginia, Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, Mrs. HARTZLER, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. BURTON of Indiana, Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania, Mr. JONES, Ms. BUERKLE, Mr. KELLY, Mr. CALVERT, Mr. BILIRAKIS, Mr. FORBES, Mr. ADERHOLT, Mr. SCALISE, Mr. HARRIS, Mr. SENSENBRENNER, Mr. POMPEO, Mr. WALBERG, Mr. MCINTYRE, Mr. CANSECO, Mr. LAMBORN, Mr. POE of Texas, Mr. PETERS, Mr. MARINO, Mr. HUELSKAMP, Mr. SHULER, Mr. GOWDY, Mr. SIRES, and Ms. ESHOO) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Calling for the protection of the rights and freedoms of
religious minorities in the Arab world.

Whereas Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change one’s religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest one’s religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”;

Whereas Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”;

Whereas, since January 2011, popular uprisings and movements for democratic change have swept the Arab world, including Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria;

Whereas many democratic reformers in the Arab world expressed aspirations for religious freedom, tolerance, and peace;

Whereas in recent months, in the midst of political transition and uncertainty in many Arab countries, minority ethno-religious communities have come under repeated and deadly attack;

Whereas, on January 1, 2011, a suicide bomber attacked the Saint George and Bishop Peter Church in Alexandria, killing 21 Coptic Christians, an ancient Egyptian religious faith community that accounts for over 10 percent of the country’s population of 82,000,000;

Whereas, on October 9, 2011, tens of thousands of Coptic Christians along with Muslims took to the streets in the Maspero section of Cairo to protest Egypt’s interim military government’s failure to protect them from attacks on churches, and, in response, were attacked by the Egyptian military and security forces in one of the deadliest assaults on the community since the revolution

began, with at least 25 Christians killed and more than 300 Copts and Muslims injured;

Whereas, on October 9, 2011, more violence was incited by Egyptian television when Egyptians were called upon to “protect the army” against the peaceful protests of the Christians;

Whereas the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces promised an independent investigation into the events surrounding the October 9, 2011, massacre, yet no action has been taken to date to punish the perpetrators of the massacre;

Whereas, on October 16, 2011, in the Upper Egyptian town of Mallawi, 17-year-old Ayman Labib, when he could not remove a cross tattooed on his wrist, was brutally attacked and murdered by students in his class who were incited by his teacher;

Whereas attacks against the Coptic Christian community have continued unabated since the revolution began, with the government creating a climate of impunity by providing little justice or protection from these attacks;

Whereas, since March 2011, tens of thousands of Copts have reportedly left Egypt, increasing the trends of refugees fleeing from Egypt;

Whereas, on October 31, 2010, the deadliest ever recorded attack on Iraqi Christians occurred at the Sayidat al-Nejat Catholic Cathedral in central Baghdad, where militants stormed the church and held parishioners hostage for several hours, and later detonated 2 suicide vests filled with ball bearings, killing 58 and wounding 78 parishioners, including 3 priests;

Whereas since the Iraq War began, over one-half of Iraq's Christian population has disappeared, been killed, or been forced into flight by terrorist groups, thereby threatening the very existence of this ancient community in Iraq;

Whereas the United States Department of State's July–December 2010 Religious Freedom Report found that the Iraqi Christian population is approximately half of its 2003 level, a staggering loss of communities that date back thousands of years;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has reported that marginalization, discrimination, threats of death, kidnapping for ransom, and attacks and murders by terrorists have threatened the elimination of Iraq's Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, and other ancient ethno-religious communities such as the Mandaeans and Yezidis; and

Whereas the Arab Spring's democracy advocates will not be safe to express themselves or achieve the benefits of a stable, peaceful, and transparent democracy until religious freedom for all, including religious minorities, and the freedoms that parallel those rights, such as freedom of association, expression, and equal protection under the law are enshrined in any future legal or political reforms in countries throughout the region: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) recognizes, in light of the upheaval brought
3 by the Arab Spring, that religious freedom is critical
4 to democratization, so that all people can freely as-
5 sociate, speak, and peacefully participate equally in
6 the political process, and that religious minorities

1 are protected during this time of transition in the
2 region;

3 (2) calls upon the Arab League and the Organi-
4 zation of Islamic Cooperation to press all member
5 nations to protect the rights of religious minorities
6 within their borders and treat those minorities as
7 equal citizens, which includes the vigorous prosecu-
8 tion of any crimes against them;

9 (3) urges the United States Government to lead
10 an international effort to support legal and political
11 reforms for the equal protection of religious freedom
12 for all as a foundation for a stable, peaceful, and
13 lasting democracy in the region by—

14 (A) making legal protection for the free-
15 dom of religion and for all who peacefully prac-
16 tice their faith a top priority in all meetings
17 with senior foreign officials, communicating the
18 message that foreign officials must—

19 (i) end the climate of impunity when
20 religious minorities are attacked;

21 (ii) vigorously prosecute those individ-
22 uals truly responsible for the attacks; and

23 (iii) ensure equality under the law for
24 all people to adopt a religion or belief of
25 their choice, to change that religion or be-

1 lief, and to manifest their religious beliefs
2 in worship, observances, practice, and
3 teaching;

4 (B) supporting and directing United States
5 officials with international programs in the
6 Middle East to work with officials, civil society
7 actors, and ethno-religious communities to edu-
8 cate all sectors of society that religious freedom
9 provides a foundation for the democratic free-
10 doms they seek to achieve;

11 (C) supporting greater Internet freedom
12 throughout the region to provide the oppor-
13 tunity for access to information and the free ex-
14 change of ideas; and

15 (D) encouraging the protection of places of
16 worship and historic religious and cultural sites
17 against terrorist attacks;

18 (4) encourages the Supreme Council of the
19 Armed Forces and the newly elected Egyptian Presi-
20 dent to ensure that the constituent assembly will
21 draft a new constitution that is representative of all
22 parts of Egyptian society, including religious minori-
23 ties;

24 (5) calls on the appointees of Egypt's con-
25 stituent assembly to enshrine the internationally rec-

1 ognized principles of freedom of religion and free-
2 dom of expression into the new constitution;

3 (6) calls upon the Government of Egypt and
4 the newly elected Egyptian President to prosecute
5 acts of violence against Christians and make their
6 protection an urgent priority; and

7 (7) calls upon the local and federal governments
8 of Iraq to prosecute acts of violence against Iraqi
9 Christians, and make the protection of ancient
10 ethno-religious minorities in Iraq an urgent priority.

