

of these indigenous communities, and their potential extinction from their ancient homeland, is deeply alarming in light of our mission to bring freedom to the Iraqi people. In addition, such violence may be an indicator of greater sectarian violence. Such rising sectarian violence and the Iraqi internally displaced people and refugee crises potentially could serve as catalysts for wider regional instability. These crises demand an urgent response from our government.

In that regard, I request that you provide responses to the following questions:

(1) Is it the State Department's view that Iraq's Christian and other non-Muslim minorities face particular threats because of their religion? Do they face a level of threat and abuse disproportionate to their representation in the Iraqi population?

(2) Has the State Department or our embassy in Baghdad sought out members of these communities to inquire as to what the United States could do to enhance their protection?

(3) What steps, if any, has the State Department taken to urge the Iraqi government to provide protection to Iraq's Christian and other non-Muslim religious minorities?

(4) Has the Iraqi government been responsive to requests for such protection?

(5) Do you have reason to believe that any Iraqi security forces or other government forces or personnel are involved in violence against such vulnerable populations?

(6) What mechanisms are in place to ensure that U.S.-trained and equipped Iraqi Security Forces do not use U.S.-provided assistance for sectarian purposes?

(7) What plans have the Agency for International Development and State Department developed to increase humanitarian assistance to Iraq's internally displaced?

I thank you in advance for the consideration of these questions, and I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA,
United States Senator.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, DC., January 11, 2008.

Hon. BARACK OBAMA,
U.S. Senate,

DEAR SENATOR OBAMA: Thank you for your letter regarding the status of Iraq's religious minorities. We regret the delay in sending you this response, but we wanted to provide you with a reply that was both comprehensive and accurate.

We share the concerns you express in your letter and assure you the Department of State takes matters relating to the safety of Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities very seriously.

Iraqis from all ethnic and religious communities suffer from the sectarian and general violence in Iraq. While it is true that in some cases religious minorities, such as Christians, are targeted due to their religion, the threat to Iraq's religious minorities is not unique to them; Shi'a in Sunni majority areas face much the same situation, and vice versa. In fact, Muslim citizens generally who do not support the actions of militants within their region are subject to similar threats. The assassination in Anbar of Sunni Sheikh Abdul Sattar Bezia al-Rishawi, who rejected extremist ideologies and sectarianism, and the murders of associates of the Shi'a Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani are recent examples of how violence impacts all of Iraq's communities, not just Christians or other non-Muslims.

Unfortunately, given the difficulty of compiling accurate data in Iraq, it is not possible to determine through statistical analysis whether violence against specific groups is

disproportionate to their representation in the population. However, communities that are isolated or small in number and that lack the means of providing for their own protection are particularly at risk.

The Department of State is coordinating closely with several U.S. Government agencies, as well as the Government of Iraq, religious leaders, and local ethnic and religious organizations in Iraq, to help alleviate the plight of minority groups. Moreover, the Embassy and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), together with Coalition Forces, are working at the national and provincial level to help the Iraqi Government provide the necessary protection and safety for all of its citizens, including Iraqi religious minorities. And the Government of Iraq continues to improve its capacity and capability to improve the overall security situation and, thereby, protect Iraq's minority communities. We would also note that while we have seen reports of violence against Iraqi non-Muslims, we have not seen evidence showing these acts were part of an orchestrated effort by Iraqi government forces.

As part of our efforts to help improve the situation for minority groups in Iraq, State Department and Embassy officials meet regularly with representatives of Iraq's ethnic and minority groups and raise their concerns with the appropriate Iraqi Government officials at all levels. The PRTs located in Ninewa province and the Kurdish region—areas with large Christian and other non-Muslim communities—also meet regularly with representatives from these communities and work to ensure that their concerns are heard at the provincial government level.

The status of religious minorities in Iraq will become more secure as groups representing them develop the capability to advocate on their own behalf and participate actively in the political system. To that end, U.S. Government-sponsored programs offer assistance to such groups upon request in areas such as conflict resolution, political party development, and human rights. In conjunction with these efforts, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) are supporting capacity-building programs for the Government of Iraq's Ministry of Displacement and Migration at both the local and national levels. While PRM focuses primarily on assisting refugees and facilitating entry into the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees, it coordinates its programs with those of USAID to ensure that as many vulnerable Iraqis as possible receive essential services as quickly as possible.

USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has five implementing partner organizations presently working with internally displaced persons (IDPs) in all 18 of Iraq's provinces. For 2007, assistance has been targeted to reach approximately 550,000 of the most vulnerable IDP beneficiaries. OFDA plans to obligate an additional \$26 million by December 31, 2007, and has requested an additional \$80 million for Iraqi IDP in FY 2008. USAID is also funding humanitarian organizations to collect data on IDP movements and needs to prioritize humanitarian assistance.

USAID's understanding of the current breakdown in IDP accommodation is that 56 percent are renting accommodations, 19 percent are living with host families, 25 percent are living in abandoned buildings such as former military sites (barracks, etc.), and less than one percent are living in tented camps. This indicates that coping mechanisms remain for the majority of IDPs, although threats and vulnerabilities still exist, includ-

ing a continuing need for access to food and potable water, adequate shelter and sanitation, and health care and other social services. In addition, IDPs are faced with border crossing closures; restrictions on their abilities to register as IDPs, and the upcoming winter. USAID is prepared to help IDPs respond to these vulnerabilities with existing resources and partners, and plans to continue responding with additional resources expected to be obligated by the end of calendar year 2007.

The Secretary of Defense could best address your question about mechanisms to ensure that U.S.-trained and equipped Iraqi Security Forces do not use U.S.-provided assistance for sectarian purposes.

We hope this information is helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

JEFFREY T. BERGNER,
Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO REVEREND DR. WALLACE S. HARTSFIELD, SR.

• Mr. BOND. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize a devoted pastor, community leader, father and friend: Reverend Dr. Wallace S. Hartsfield, Sr.

On January 1 of this year, Reverend Hartsfield retired as senior pastor of the Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church in Kansas City, MO. He served as the congregation's pastor for more than 40 years and as a dedicated member of the clergy for more than 55 years.

Dr. Hartsfield has worked as a key leader and mentor in social, political, and religious circles in Kansas City and throughout the country. He has served at every level of the National Baptist Convention of America and as the president of the General Baptist Convention of Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska.

My friend, Congressman EMANUEL CLEAVER, has dubbed this remarkable leader the "Godfather of Preachers" for his ministerial knowledge and superior oratorical skills.

Countless Kansas Citians—and Americans—have been touched by this man and his messages. Always positive, Dr. Hartsfield speaks out for peace, social and racial justice, AIDS intervention, faith, and hard work. And like a true pastor, he cares deeply for his congregation and the surrounding community. My guess is he will not slow down much even in retirement.

As a measure of our appreciation for Pastor Hartsfield's long service to the community, Congressman CLEAVER, Senator McCASKILL, and I worked to enact legislation designating the U.S. Postal Service facility at 4320 Blue Parkway in Kansas City the "Wallace S. Hartsfield Post Office Building." This designation is but small recognition of Dr. Hartsfield's many accomplishments as a minister, dedicated community activist, civil servant, and compassionate role model. I am proud to call him a friend.

Future generations will look to his leadership and example to find hope and inspiration. Dr. Hartsfield has truly made the world a better place.●

HONORING MAXINE FROST

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the accomplishments of Maxine Pierce Frost, a longtime community leader in Riverside, CA, and nationally renown leader in education. In November 2007 Maxine Frost announced her retirement from the Riverside Unified School District after 40 years of dedicated service. Due to failing health, she died shortly thereafter.

Since 1967, Maxine Frost has provided leadership to her community, the State of California, and our Nation. As a board member of the Riverside Unified School District, Frost has seen great change in education policy throughout her tenure. Being a member of the first large school district in the Nation to voluntarily desegregate, she has helped pave the way for similar changes across America.

Throughout periods of intense growth in the State and the region, Maxine Frost has worked diligently to ensure that students and educators are provided with adequate resources. The Riverside Unified School District has grown from roughly 23,000 students to 43,000 students during Frost's tenure. Throughout this period of intense growth, she has maintained her resolve that every student have the resources they need to succeed.

Numerous academic committees across the State of California and our Nation have benefitted from the leadership and experience of Maxine Frost. She has held a number of leadership posts: president of the Pacific Region of National School Boards Association, the California School Boards Association Legislative Network, the California Association of Suburban School Districts, the Schools Accrediting Commissions, the Council for Basic Education, and the California Association of Student Council's Board of Directors. In 1981, after serving as president of the California School Boards Association, California Governor George Deukmejian appointed her to the Education Commission of the States, in which she served alongside future President William Jefferson Clinton, who chaired the commission at that time.

On October 16, 2006, the Riverside Unified School District adopted a resolution to designate one of its elementary schools as Maxine Frost Elementary School, in honor of her longtime service and dedication to the community.

On her retirement from four decades of service and dedication to the students, families, and educators of California and our Nation, I am pleased to ask my colleagues to join me in posthumously thanking her for her fine work. Her tremendous leadership and

lifetime of achievement will be long remembered.●

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF MUIR WOODS NATIONAL MONUMENT

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I take this opportunity to observe the 100th anniversary of Muir Woods National Monument, located in Marin County, CA.

It was U.S. Representative William Kent whose visionary actions would lead to the creation of Muir Woods National Monument. During the mid-nineteenth century, the Gold Rush brought treasure seekers to northern California in large numbers. To accommodate this rapid population growth in San Francisco and other coastal cities, timber, meat, and crops were needed in much larger quantities. As a result, much of the easily accessible timber in Marin County was logged between 1840 and 1870.

Representative Kent witnessed this massive resource depletion and decided to take action to preserve coastal redwood forest areas. In 1905, he purchased 612 acres of the Redwood Canyon from the Tamalpais Land & Water Co. On December 26, 1907, in order to best protect the land, Representative Kent and his wife, Elizabeth Thatcher Kent, donated 298 acres of Redwood Canyon to the Federal Government. On January 9, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt declared Muir Woods a National Monument. This year, we celebrate its centennial anniversary.

Coast redwoods, *Sequoia sempervirens*, are the dominant feature of Muir Woods' forest. These ancient wonders are also the world's tallest living tree species and the official tree of the State of California. This species of redwood is believed to have existed when the dinosaurs roamed the Earth. Visitors to Muir Woods are left fascinated as they get to experience living history by exploring the Bohemian and Cathedral groves of Muir Woods, where many trees are more than 1,200 years old. Muir Woods is also home to douglas fir, tanbark oak, bigleaf maple, and bay laurel trees, leading conservationist and namesake John Muir to remark that Muir Woods "is the best tree-lovers' monument that could possibly be found in all the forests of the world."

Only 15 miles north of San Francisco, Muir Woods National Monument offers a stunning glimpse of the redwood forests that once covered northern California's coastal valleys. For 100 years, Muir Woods National Monument has served as a recreational escape for nature enthusiasts, hikers, and those seeking a glimpse of northern California's rich history. It is a powerful reminder of the beauty of nature and the importance of conservation efforts.

I commend the National Park Service staff and volunteers for maintaining the natural beauty and historical significance of Muir Woods National Monument. I look forward to future generations having the opportunity to study and enjoy this unique piece of our State and national history for another 100 years.●

generations having the opportunity to study and enjoy this unique piece of our State and national history for another 100 years.●

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF PINNACLES NATIONAL MONUMENT

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I take this opportunity to recognize the 100th anniversary of Pinnacles National Monument, located in San Benito County, CA.

On January 16, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed 2,080 acres of the Pinnacles National Forest Reserve as Pinnacles National Monument. This year, we celebrate its centennial anniversary. Part of an extinct volcano, the spectacular geology of Pinnacles National Monument has fascinated visitors for decades. A variety of flora and fauna flourishes in this unusual landscape, including an exquisite chaparral ecosystem and nearly 400 species of bees, the highest known bee-diversity of any place on Earth.

Situated near the San Andreas Rift Zone with the Central Coast to the west and Gabilan Mountain Range to the east, Pinnacles National Monument now occupies over 26,000 acres 14,000 acres of which are congressionally designated wilderness. With surrounding lands tended by farmers whose ancestors homesteaded the region and cowboys who watch over the cattle that graze on the expansive plains, Pinnacles National Monument offers a sublime glimpse into California's past.

Pinnacles is home to 20 endemic species holding special Federal or state status and is also the ancestral home range of the California condor. Pinnacles is the only National Park site that releases and maintains this extremely endangered bird species, and is critical to the overall condor recovery effort. Pinnacles is also located within the Pacific Flyway migratory route and contains the highest concentration of nesting prairie falcons of any national park in the country.

Only 100 miles from the urban centers of San Francisco and San Jose, Pinnacles National Monument remains a haven of solitude for nature enthusiasts and offers a stunning reflection of California's rural history and heritage. For 100 years, Pinnacles National Monument has served as a recreational escape for hikers, outdoor enthusiasts, and those seeking a glimpse of California's rich history. It is a powerful reminder of the beauty of nature and the importance of conservation efforts.

I commend the National Park Service staff and volunteers for maintaining the natural beauty and historical significance of Pinnacles National Monument. I look forward to future generations having the opportunity to study and enjoy this unique piece of our State and national history for another 100 years.●