



Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

September 29, 2015

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

In recent months, as Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I have urged Congress to pass legislation to reauthorize the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) whose mandate expires on September 30, 2015. I understand that S. 2078, a bipartisan bill now moving through the Senate, would extend USCIRF's mandate for four years, allowing it to continue to perform its vital mission of supporting international religious freedom. I urge you to lend your vote to quickly pass this legislation.

At a time of partisan division, it is a welcome sign that Senators Corker (R-TN), Cardin (D-MD), Rubio (R-FL), and Durbin (D-IL) were able to come together to reauthorize the Commission. It is my hope that this legislation will be swiftly adopted so that the broader improvements to our nation's international religious freedom efforts, such as those contained in *Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2015 (H.R. 1150)*, can be debated and adopted.

The Catholic Church has long viewed protection of religious freedom as a "cornerstone of the structure of human rights" since it is rooted in the dignity of the human person. Protecting religious freedom is critical to the health of societies. Over the years, USCCB has advocated strongly for the mission of USCIRF because of its critical role in promoting human rights around the world by monitoring and promoting religious freedom. At a time when international religious freedom is increasingly imperiled, it is vital that USCIRF be reauthorized so that it can continue to highlight the need to protect those who are discriminated against, harassed and even killed for their faith.

As Pope Francis reminded us in his address last week in Philadelphia, "In a world where various forms of modern tyranny seek to suppress religious freedom, or try to reduce it to a subculture without right to a voice in the public square, or to use religion as a pretext for hatred and brutality, it is imperative that the followers of the various religions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance and respect for the dignity and rights of others."

In the wake of Pope Francis' historic visit, I ask you to call for the protection of international religious freedom by passing S. 2078 to reauthorize USCIRF.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú

Bishop of Las Cruces

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace



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United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

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