

Eshoo Urges Support of Iraqi Religious Diversity

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WASHINGTON, DC -- Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Palo Alto) today offered an amendment to H.R. 2601, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, to protect indigenous Christians in Iraq from continuing religious persecution and political exclusion. The amendment unanimously passed the House by a voice vote.

"Iraqi Christians welcome the opportunity to move beyond the days of repression and persecution," said Eshoo. "They wish nothing more than to be able to fully cooperate and participate in the development of a democratic, pluralistic state, and the commitment provided by this amendment gives them great promise."

Eshoo's amendment urges the departments and agencies of the U.S. Government to pay special attention to the welfare of ChaldoAssyrians, "an ancient population that predates current Iraqi inhabitants," and other Iraqi Christians, including Chaldeans, Jacobites, Armenians, Assyrians, and Greek Orthodox Christians, who have been the subject of great harassment and intimidation even after the fall of Saddam Hussein. The amendment also calls on the President and his administration to work with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to dedicate funding for the promotion of welfare and education, as well as the resettlement for these minority groups in Iraq.

These groups receive a disproportionately small share of the reconstruction and developmental resources available, which in turn has spurred the emigration of as many of 80,000 Iraqi Christians since liberation.

Despite the huge number of Iraqi Christians who have fled the region, there are approximately 1 to 1.5 million Christians remaining in Iraq. They primarily reside in the Nineveh Plain in the north near Mosul, in villages that can trace their history back over 2,000 years.

"ChaldoAssyrians and other native Iraqi Christians are not only being ostracized and repressed, they are also being kept from their homes," Eshoo said. "Protecting the rights of minority groups and ensuring that all individuals in Iraq -- regardless of religious affiliation or ethnic background -- are given the tools they need to succeed, is critical to establishing a fully-functioning and sustainable democracy."

Read Rep. Eshoo's complete floor statement.

Congresswoman Eshoo has served in the House of Representatives since 1993. She is currently the only Assyrian-American member of Congress.

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