

U. S. Must Address Threats to Religious Minorities in Iraq - USCIRF

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WASHINGTON - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, bipartisan federal agency, has sent a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urging the U.S. government to address the severe threats to Iraq's smallest religious minorities.

"While all Iraqis are threatened by violence, the non-Muslim minorities face particularized forms of harassment and abuse; what is more, these groups appear to suffer a degree of violent attacks and other human rights abuses disproportionate to their numbers," says the letter, signed on behalf of the Commission by Chairman Michael Cromartie.

The Commission urges the U.S. government to take more effective action to respond to the flood of refugees and internally displaced people—a crisis that has grown in part due to sectarian violence. The Commission will hold the second of two public hearings on the situation in Iraq on Sept. 19. This hearing will examine intra-Muslim sectarian violence, including what role, if any, the Iraqi government currently plays in that violence. That hearing will also examine U.S. policy in relation to Iraq's refugee crisis.

In the letter, the Commission urges several steps the U.S. government and Iraqis can take to boost protection of Iraq's endangered religious minority communities, including police training and the U.S. government convening a symposium of minority representatives to examine ways to improve security. It calls for increased humanitarian and development assistance and measures to ensure that aid reaches the intended beneficiaries. The Commission also recommends increased U.S. support for international agencies working with displaced people. The letter follows