

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to you today to express our profound concern over the escalating violence and intolerance towards religious minorities in Pakistan, including Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, and Shia Muslims.

These minorities face systematic violence, attacks on their places of worship, constitutional and legal discrimination, and widespread restrictions on religious freedom. Non-Muslim women and girls, in particular, are frequently subjected to abductions and forced religious conversions.

Promoting religious freedom is vital to our national security interests in the region, and must play an important role in our policies towards Pakistan. By encouraging the development of a secular democracy that protects minority rights, we are simultaneously preventing the growth of extremism and bigotry in the country.

With the election of a new government in Pakistan, we believe that it is a critical time for the State Department to address this mounting crisis and ensure that religious freedom is a top priority as our nation moves into a new stage in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. Consequently, we urge the State Department to work closely with the Government of Pakistan to implement the following religious freedom recommendations:

1. Repeal or revise the blasphemy laws, and any constitutional provisions and statutory laws that institutionalize the inferior status of minorities, as well as, women and girls.
2. Create new hate crime legislation to protect non-Muslims from attacks and to prosecute religiously motivated violence by state and non-state actors. Similarly, enact federal and provincial laws against forced conversions.
3. Provide physical security to non-Muslim communities and religious sites that are vulnerable to attack.
4. Enforce bans on Islamist militant groups and radical clerics that incite or engage in anti-minority violence.
5. Reform the public education system so that it fosters tolerance and pluralism, and trains teachers to respect the religious rights of minority students.

6. Empower religious minorities to independently manage their own religious institutions free from government interference, especially Hindus who lack control over temples and crematoriums.

7. Strengthen the mandate of the National Commission on Minorities to include greater investigative and policy making powers in order to effectively address incidents of violence and discrimination against minorities. Currently, the Commission can only make recommendations to the government, and is considered ineffective by human rights groups.

Thank you and we look forward to your response.

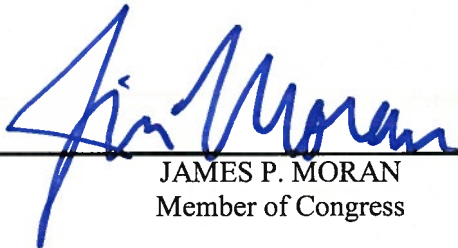
Sincerely,



MICHAEL M. HONDA
Member of Congress



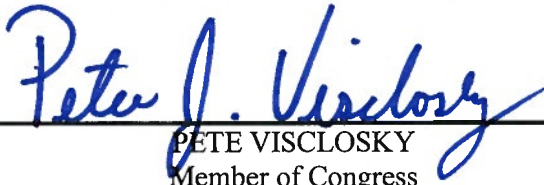
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JOHN CONYERS
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GUS BILIRAKIS
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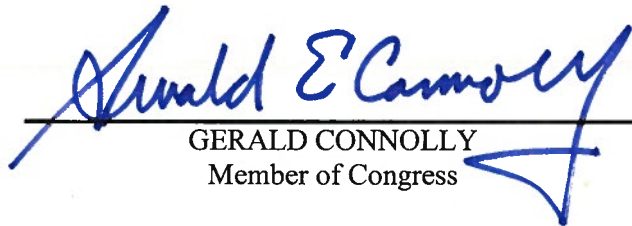
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KENNY MARCHANT
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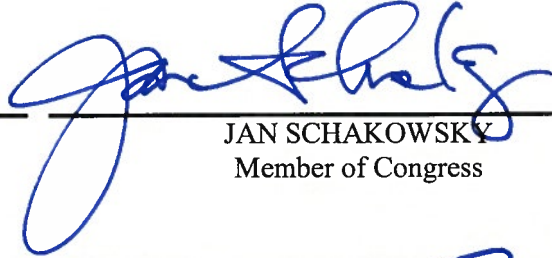
JACKIE SPEIER
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MIKE KELLEY
Member of Congress



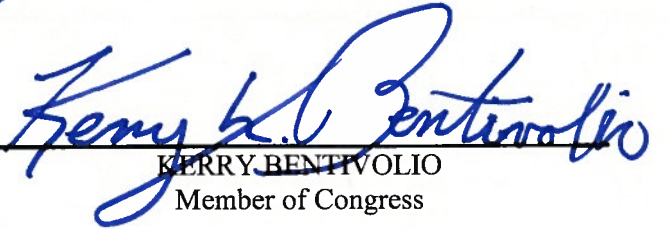
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KERRY BENTIVOLIO
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STEVE CHABOT
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