



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Dr. John Eibner
CEO
Christian Solidarity International – USA
870 Hampshire Road, Suite T
Westlake Village, CA 91361

Dear John:

Thank you for your May 6 letter expressing concern for the welfare and long-term future of Iraq's Christian communities. I shared your letter with the Secretary, and she asked that I respond on her behalf.

We agree that the long-term future of Iraq's Christian and other religious minority communities is an extremely important issue, and we share your concern for their continued safety. As you noted, Iraq's Christian communities comprise a disproportionately high percentage of Iraqi refugees in the region. According to a March 2009 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, about 14 percent of Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR in the region are Christian, whereas Christians constitute less than five percent of Iraq's population.

We are working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to help resettle in the United States the most vulnerable refugees for whom return to Iraq is not an option. Since October 2006, the United States government has resettled over 25,000 Iraqi refugees in the United States, more than 40 percent of whom have been Christian.

Resettlement in the United States, however, can only be a solution for a small percentage of Iraqi refugees. We believe that the long-term solution for a majority of Iraqi refugees will be their eventual voluntary and safe return to and reintegration in Iraq. One of our primary goals is to provide humanitarian assistance to sustain refugees in the region until it is safe for them to return home. The USG contributed \$400 million for humanitarian assistance programs for Iraqi refugees, internally displaced persons, and conflict victims in FY 2008 and has contributed more than

\$150 million thus far in FY 2009. We expect to make more contributions later this year.

The return and reintegration of Iraqi refugees will depend in large part on the security situation in Iraq. While terrorist and criminal violence continues to affect some areas, overall improvements in security have allowed for a return to normalcy in many parts of Iraq, as well as the return of some internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. According to UNHCR, over 200,000 displaced Iraqis returned to Iraq and/or their homes in 2008, approximately 10 percent of whom were refugees. UNHCR anticipates that as many as 500,000 IDPs and refugees could return in 2009 if the overall security situation continues to improve.

We are aware that in the past few months, several Christians and Sabean-Mandaeans have been killed in attacks in Kirkuk and Mosul – some of these are believed to be criminal attacks and in others, the motives are still under investigation.

We also note that the Iraqi constitution contains a provision that guarantees the administrative and political rights of religious minorities, and we encourage minority groups to take full advantage of this provision.

The State Department, in coordination with USAID and other agencies, is continuing its assistance efforts for Iraqi refugees and IDPs, with a particular focus on working with the Government of Iraq to create conditions for safe and voluntary returns. In addition, Ambassador Hill is taking a fresh look at how we can improve conditions to encourage the return of displaced Iraqis, including minorities.

We appreciate your interest in this very sensitive and important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Schmierer', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Richard J. Schmierer
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Near East Affairs