

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 840

Condemning continuing violations of religious freedom in the Middle East,
and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 15, 2009

Mr. BURTON of Indiana (for himself, Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, and Mr. FRANKS of Arizona) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Condemning continuing violations of religious freedom in the
Middle East, and for other purposes.

Whereas for thousands of years, a broad and diverse array of religious communities have resided in the Middle East, including numerous denominations of Christians, Muslims, Jews, and others;

Whereas the increasing activity, both political and violent, of Islamist extremists throughout the region have caused the displacement within or emigration from the Middle East of many indigenous Christians, Jews, and others;

Whereas government-controlled media in Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other countries, as well as in the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip,

continue to publish and broadcast anti-Semitic and anti-Israel materials that demonize and stereotype Jews;

Whereas the Government of Iran continues to persecute many Iranian religious communities;

Whereas the Government of Iran does not recognize any non-Muslim religious minority communities other than Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians;

Whereas all non-Muslim religious minorities are prohibited from running for all but 5 seats in the national legislature, from serving in the security services and the judiciary, and from working as public school principals;

Whereas Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has reportedly called for a crackdown on Christianity in that country, and the Government of Iran continues to close down churches and arrest converts to Christianity;

Whereas the Government of Iran has taken and continues to take special measures to harass and discriminate against Baha'is, including seizing their communal property, arresting and imprisoning them on account of their faith, banning them from practicing or teaching their religion, prohibiting their official assembly, closing their communal institutions, effectively precluding them from enrollment in state-run universities, excluding them from the social pension system, refusing them legal compensation for injuries, denying them the right to inherit property, and frequently charging them with espionage for Israel;

Whereas anti-Israel demonstrations in Iran increasingly include the denunciation of Jews and Iranian synagogues and continue to be assaulted;

Whereas Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly and virulently denounced the Jewish State of Israel, has openly denied the Holocaust;

Whereas apostasy and conversion from Islam are punishable by death in Iran;

Whereas the 2008 Department of State Country Report on International Religious Freedom on Iran stated that “During the reporting period, respect for religious freedom in the country continued to deteriorate . . . government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi’a religious groups, most notably for Baha’is, as well as Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, and members of the Jewish community . . . reports of Government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the reporting period . . . Baha’i religious groups reported arbitrary arrests, expulsions from universities, and confiscation of property.”;

Whereas in February 2008 a revision to the Syrian Penal Code was drafted for approval by the legislature whereby apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, would be punishable by death under the revised Penal Code;

Whereas the Government of Syria reportedly continues to bar Syrian Jews from working in the armed forces or civil service, gives extra scrutiny to applications by Jews for government documents, and lists religion on the identity cards and passports of Jews, and Jews alone;

Whereas in July 2006, the Syrian Deputy Minister of Religious Endowment declared on state television that Jews are cursed and called them “the descendants of apes and pigs”;

Whereas the 2008 Department of State Country Report on International Religious Freedom on Syria stated that: “The Government continued to outlaw the Jehovah’s Witnesses . . . in addition, the Government continued to monitor the activities of all groups, including religious groups, and discouraged proselytizing, which it deemed a threat to relations among religious groups.”;

Whereas the Government of Saudi Arabia does not recognize or protect freedom of religion under the law;

Whereas the Government of Saudi Arabia continues to engage in political, economic, religious, legal, and social discrimination against those who do not adhere to the state-backed Wahhabi interpretation of Islam;

Whereas there are numerous reports of harassment, violence, and murder by the Saudi mutawwai’in (state religious police);

Whereas textbooks in Saudi state-sponsored schools reportedly continue to include statements of hate and contempt for Christians, Jews, Shiite Muslims, Isma‘ilis, and others;

Whereas in Saudi Arabia, foreign workers and their family members have reportedly been exploited, discriminated against, arrested, or deported on account of their religious beliefs;

Whereas, according to the United States Department of State, customs officials in Saudi Arabia “confiscated or censored materials considered offensive, including Christian Bibles and religious videotapes”;

Whereas the Government of Saudi Arabia reportedly continues to refuse to finance the construction or maintenance of Shiite mosques, deny approval for the construc-

tion or registration of Shiite community centers, and prohibit the import or sale of Shiite religious paraphernalia;

Whereas the 2008 Department of State Country Report on International Religious Freedom on Saudi Arabia stated that: “The public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited, and mutawwa’in (religious police) continued to conduct raids of private non-Muslim religious gatherings . . . although the Government also confirmed its policy to protect the right to possess and use personal religious materials, it did not provide for this right in law, and the mutawwa’in sometimes confiscated the personal religious material of non-Muslims.”;

Whereas since the radical Islamist group Hamas violently seized power in the Gaza Strip in June of 2007, harassment of and violence against Christians has increased;

Whereas Christian-owned stores in Gaza, such as the Bible Society bookstore, have been targets of firebombs and gunfire;

Whereas Palestinian Authority officials have in the past failed to effectively combat harassment of and violence against Christian residents of Bethlehem;

Whereas the Government of Egypt continues to refuse to recognize conversions by Egyptian Muslims to Christianity;

Whereas the 2008 Department of State Country Report on International Religious Freedom on Egypt stated that: “The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice.”;

Whereas Islamic extremists in Iraq have bombed dozens churches in the past 4 years and demanded Christians ei-

ther convert or pay thousands of dollars in ransom, and have kidnapped or killed a number of Christian clergy;

Whereas many of Iraq’s Christian population has been forced to flee their homes under threats from Islamic extremists;

Whereas Sabeian-Mandaeans reported that Islamic extremists threatened, kidnapped, and killed members of their religion for refusing to convert to Islam;

Whereas the 2008 Department of State Country Report on International Religious Freedom on Iraq stated that: “While the Government generally endorsed freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, violence conducted by terrorists, extremists, and criminal gangs restricted the free exercise of religion and posed a significant threat to the country’s vulnerable religious minorities throughout the reporting period . . . radical Islamic elements from outside the Government exerted tremendous pressure on individuals and groups to conform to extremist interpretations of Islamic precepts . . . sectarian violence, including attacks on clergy and religious places of worship, hampered the ability to practice religion freely . . . as the Government began to exhibit the will and capacity to challenge its militant opponents, the violence began to abate and the Government became increasingly successful in restoring security, in a generally nonsectarian manner, throughout the country.”; and

Whereas in addition to the many reports of violations of religious freedom in the Middle East, many other incidents are never reported due to fear of further persecution: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

1 (1) condemns violations of religious freedom in
2 the Middle East; and

3 (2) calls on the President to—

4 (A) direct the Secretary of State, as well
5 as the United States representative at all appli-
6 cable international institutions, to urge that vio-
7 lations of religious freedom in the Middle East
8 be considered and addressed in all appropriate
9 international fora;

10 (B) consider the status of religious free-
11 dom in each country in the Middle East when
12 assessing and developing relations with govern-
13 ments in the region; and

14 (C) further incorporate religious freedom
15 into bilateral and multilateral strategic dia-
16 logues; and

17 (D) denounce, strongly and repeatedly, de-
18 monizing of and incitement against Jews,
19 Christians, Muslims, Baha'is, and other reli-
20 gious communities in media and educational
21 textbooks controlled or sponsored by Middle
22 Eastern governments.

○