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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

December 16, 2008

Commissioner Felice D. Gaer
Chair
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
800 N. Capitol Street, N.W., Suite 790
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Commissioner Gaer:

I write to express my support for your Commission's new report on the challenges faced by the religious minority communities in Iraq. The plight of Iraq's small and shrinking Iraqi Christian and religious minorities' population is tragic and deeply concerning. While we have seen violence in Baghdad and many areas of Iraq decline, violence in Nineveh province has increased and, in some cases, the violence is now targeted directly at the Iraqi Christian and other religious minority communities.

It is also becoming increasingly clear that the religious minority community in Northern Iraq is in the middle of a struggle for power and control of land and the resources underneath the land. This tragic situation requires the attention of the new Administration and U.S. military commanders on the ground in Iraq. I have urged the Multi-National Division- North Commander to concentrate as much attention as possible on the plight of the Iraqi Christian community and it is critical that this attention is sustained as we transition to a new administration. The timing of your Commission's report will assist in keeping this issue at the forefront of the policy debate.

There are a number of the Commission's findings I particularly want to commend you for including: pressing the Iraqi government to work with vulnerable religious minorities to establish, fund, train, and deploy police units for their communities that are representative of those communities and to ensure that such units remain in their locations of origin to the greatest extent possible. The Iraqi government has issued an order to this effect, but they have failed to adequately fund this training and deployment effort. It will also be critical to ensure free and fair provincial elections for all Iraqis, including minority areas in northern Iraq. Without free and easy access to the polls, the

religious minority population will be further marginalized by a lack of representation with the newly formed institutions of Iraq.

Again, I congratulate you and your commission on this report, and assure you that I will continue to do all I can to ensure that Iraq's Christian population and other religious minorities are able to live freely in their ancestral home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carl Levin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carl Levin
Chairman