



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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June 19, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly
U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016

Dear Secretary Kelly,

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration and Committee on International Justice and Peace, we write with grave concern about certain Christians, Chaldean Catholics, and others from Michigan and Tennessee who are reported to be scheduled for deportation from the United States tomorrow. Returning religious minorities to Iraq at this time, without specific plans for protection, does not appear consistent with our concerns about genocide and persecution of Christians in Iraq. We strongly encourage you to exercise the discretion available to you under law to defer the deportation of persons to Iraq, particularly Christians and Chaldean Catholics, who pose no threat to U.S. public safety, until such time as the situation in Iraq stabilizes and its government proves willing and capable of protecting the rights of religious minorities.

The United States government, our Holy Father Pope Francis, and the Christian Churches in Iraq all recognize that Christians and other religious minorities are the victims of genocide in Iraq. Despite this recognition, the Administration is reportedly working to remove dozens of individuals who come from such persecuted religious minority groups back to Iraq. The persecution that the Christian and Chaldean Catholic community has faced in Iraq is well-documented. Congress has expressed profound concern for the situation of Christians and other minorities in Iraq. Various pieces of legislation under consideration or being developed would provide greater support to remaining Christians and other minorities who are internally displaced and would seek to provide a special designation for Christians and other minorities targeted for genocide to enter the refugee resettlement program. The deportations to this same country, under such scrutiny for abuse and genocide of Christian and other minorities, seems to run counter to what is happening in other parts of our government.

For decades, many of these Christians sought legal refuge in the United States. Like other refugees from various countries of origins, they have become integrated into American communities, and in this instance, they are contributing members of communities in Michigan and Tennessee.

While we urge review of these Christian and Chaldean Catholic cases in light of the situation in Iraq, we note that some these individuals have orders of deportation because they have committed serious criminal offenses in the past. We do not minimize the serious criminal offenses of which some of these individuals have been convicted; it is entirely appropriate that they be punished for their offenses. After serving their sentences, however, we believe it would

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not be just or humane to deport a person who has integrated into American life and poses no evident risk to the local community. The fact that they have a significant risk of experiencing persecution and even possible bodily harm because of their faith is, from our moral perspective, an important factor to be weighed in the calculation to deport.

Our country has been an international leader in providing refuge to those who have escaped religious persecution. It is an admirable part of our history as a nation. To that end, we request that you exercise the discretion available to you under law to defer the deportation of the Christians and Chaldean Catholics, and other persons who pose no threat to U.S. public safety to Iraq until the situation in Iraq stabilizes and its government proves capable of protecting the rights of religious minorities.

Similarly, we urge that all individuals who do not pose a threat to the safety of Americans, and for whom deportation would either separate the family or be dangerous to their person, be shown mercy going forward. We must continue to protect those seeking refuge for those at risk due to the practice of their faith, and those for whom deportation would break up the cornerstone of our society, the family.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin
Chairman, USCCB Committee
on Migration



Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, USCCB Committee on
International Justice and Peace



Daniel Cardinal DiNardo
Archbishop of Galveston-Houston
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