

**Position Paper: HR 440 – creates Special Envoy for Religious Minorities
in the Near East and South Central Asia**

We appreciate the serious issues raised in the proposed legislation. As written in its current draft, we oppose the bill as it infringes on the Secretary's flexibility to make appropriate staffing decisions. The bill is unnecessary as it duplicates a number of ongoing activities at the Department being managed at the highest levels. Of senior diplomats who regularly address these issues, the most prominent and effective is the Secretary of State herself, who has consistently raised human rights and religious freedom in bilateral and multilateral meetings here at the Department and while on travel abroad. Notably, we have an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, a Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and an Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, all of whom are focused on religious freedom issues. Additionally, the Department supports active diplomacy with countries on human rights, in diplomacy conducted by our assistant secretaries of state, our ambassadors, and other key diplomatic staff. Finally, we report on these issues in annual, global reports on religious freedom and human rights.

Through the department's active efforts, we have addressed these issues through visa revocations/ineligibilities of Iranian officials; the release of the two Afghan converts; successfully pressing the Iraqi government to improve security conditions for minority religious groups (no new attacks on Christians sites this year); and pressing the Egyptians to investigate/prosecute those involved in attacking Coptic churches and Sufi sites and in attacks on individuals.

The new special envoy position is unnecessary, duplicative, and likely counterproductive.

- The responsibilities of the position would duplicate and potentially conflict with those of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, established under § 101 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 ("IRF Act"), 22 U.S.C. § 6411. NEA and SCA embassy personnel, including COMs, are already fully engaged on religious freedom issues. Most importantly, dictating that the Secretary establish a position, which can't be a dual-hatted position, and cut other positions to fund it, is highly objectionable as it deprives the Secretary other inherent authority and flexibility and run the Department in a manner that well best advances foreign policy.
- Establishing an additional special envoy with functions that overlap the existing ambassador at large will unnecessarily complicate the Department's efforts to develop a coordinated approach to the protection of religious freedoms abroad. The Ambassador at Large has made the NEA and SCA regions a priority.
- Devoting funds for an additional special envoy and related staff would unnecessarily divert scarce resources from other vital activities to promote international religious freedom. Offset provision would force the Secretary to eliminate positions in the Department for a position that is duplicative.