President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. President:

May God bless you in these challenging times!

I write with a heavy heart regarding a matter of utmost urgency: the desperate plight of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq. Pope Francis recently wrote to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon. In his letter the Holy Father decried how “Christians and other religious minorities have been forced to flee from their homes and witness the destruction of their places of worship and religious patrimony.” Pope Francis placed before the Secretary General “the tears, the suffering and the heartfelt cries of despair of Christians and other religious minorities of the beloved land of Iraq.” The Catholic bishops and people of the United States share these tears, sufferings and heartfelt cries.

We are grateful for the humanitarian assistance and protection that our nation has provided to those fleeing, often with only the clothes on their backs, and for the way the United States has worked with Iraqi officials to encourage the formation of an inclusive government in Iraq that respects human rights and religious freedom for all.

More must be done. Pope Francis called upon “the international community, particularly through the norms and mechanisms of international law, to do all that it can to stop and to prevent further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities.” I urge the United States to answer this call in concert with the international community.

We know too well that attacks on religious and ethnic minorities are attacks on the health of an entire society. Violence may begin against minorities, but it does not end there. The rights of all Iraqis are at risk from the current situation.

Please be assured of our support and prayers. Our Conference of Bishops has set aside Sunday, August 17, for the intentions for peace in the Middle East and Iraq. We are urging our people to let their elected representatives know of their concern for Christians and other religious minorities who suffer untold persecution in Iraq, Syria, and other countries. May God grant our nation and the international community the wisdom and courage needed to help restore peace and bind up the wounds in Iraq.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Archbishop of Louisville
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops