

Open Doors Urges Religious Freedom Bill Passage

Open Doors USA has launched a new advocacy campaign to encourage the U.S. Senate to pass a bill to appoint a religious freedom envoy in the Near East and South Central Asia.

Last year Open Doors USA supported a bill in the House called H.R. 440, which would require the Obama administration to appoint a Special Envoy for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. H.R. 440 was passed by the House last year. This was partially due to the advocacy campaign Open Doors launched, encouraging concerned citizens to contact their U.S. representative, asking him or her to vote for the bill.

Near East countries include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and also the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

South Central Asian countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

All of the countries are on the Open Doors 2012 World Watch List of the worst persecutors of Christians, with the exception of Israel, Lebanon and Nepal. The Special Envoy would be appointed by the president and report to the president and Secretary of State.

A Senate companion bill called S. 1245 was introduced last year, but it still has not been brought to a vote. Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA) has placed a hold on the bill, preventing it from moving forward. If S. 1245 is not passed in this session of Congress and signed into law, the process will have to be

started all over next year in the new session of Congress.

“This important bill won’t be moved to a vote unless enough people concerned with the persecution of religious minorities are willing to speak out and ask their senators to take action,” says Open Doors USA advocacy director Lindsay Vessey. “The Special Envoy would address economic and security concerns of these minority faith groups, which is especially needed in a country like Iraq, where large numbers of Christians and other faith groups have been threatened, forced to flee their homeland and killed. “With a third of the U.S. Senate facing election votes in the fall, it is a great time to share with your elected officials about the issues most important to you. Please take just a few minutes to join with us in this critical endeavor.”

Open Doors is encouraging constituents to contact their U.S. senators. If enough senators support S. 1245, they will create much more pressure on Sen. Webb to release his hold and allow the bill to move to a vote.

The Open Doors Advocacy website has a sample letter available for constituents to send to their senators at .