

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

MONMOUTH
112 Village Center Drive
Freehold, NJ 07728-2510
(732) 780-3035

OCEAN
405 Route 539
Plumsted, NJ 08514-2303
(609) 286-2571; (732) 350-2300

MERCER
4573 South Broad Street
Hamilton, NJ 08620-2215
(609) 585-7878

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

<http://chrissmith.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

SENIOR MEMBER, FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
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**Floor Statement on HR 390, “The Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and
Accountability Act of 2018”**

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

*Rep. Chris. Smith (R-NJ), Chairman
November 27, 2018
Excerpts of Remarks*

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to support H.R. 390, the bipartisan Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act.

Special thanks to Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy for his strong and sustained support for this bill, for his amazing staff, especially Luke Murry, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and his Chief of Staff, Sharon Soderstrom.

Thanks also to House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce and Ranking Member Eliot Engel.

I would also like to thank my good friend Anna Eshoo and Matt McMurray, her Chief of Staff. This has always been bipartisan legislation with Anna as the lead cosponsor and original cosponsors from both parties. She has been a relentless advocate for genocide-targeted communities in Iraq and Syria and has been a great partner on this bill.

My thanks to Mary Noonan, my Chief of Staff, Piero Tozzi, Staff Director for my foreign affairs subcommittee, Nathaniel Hurd at the U.S. Helsinki Commission who has

been lead staffer on the bill, and David Trimble, Senior Fellow at the Religious Freedom Institute. They have all been essential to this bill advancing through the Congress. Legislation is always the fruit of many co-workers in the vineyard.

In September of 2013 I chaired my first of 10 hearings focused in whole or part on Christians, Yezidis, and other religious and ethnic minorities targeted by ISIS for genocide and other atrocity crimes. On September 8, 2016, I introduced H.R. 5961, frustrated and deeply disappointed that the Administration was failing to intentionally direct aid to these survivors and support criminal investigations into perpetrators.

Local, over-stretched groups on the ground were being forced to fill the gap, like the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese of Erbil in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, supported by the Knights of Columbus under the leadership of Carl Anderson and by Aid to the Church in Need. To date Aid to the Church in Need has contributed more than \$60 million, and the Knights more than \$20 million, to the response in the region. Without this support from private charities, many more people would have died, been afflicted by disease, or forced to flee Iraq.

Just before Christmas in 2016, I led a delegation to Erbil at the invitation of the Chaldean Archbishop of Erbil, Bashar Warda, who was heroically leading the effort to sustain more than 70,000 Christians who had fled ISIS, as well as some Yezidis and Muslims.

There I met with genocide survivors, almost all of whom told me they had family members murdered by ISIS. Their stories were tragic beyond words but members of my delegation and I were in awe of their deep and abiding faith in God, their resiliency, and their courage.

We visited a camp of 6,000 internally displaced persons, managed by the Archdiocese, that the U.S. government had never visited until just before our trip, even though it was only 10 minutes from the U.S. consulate.

On January 10, 2017, I introduced H.R. 390, a stronger version of the previous bill. This House unanimously passed H.R. 390 on June 6, 2017. On October 11 of this year, the Senate unanimously passed a slightly amended version, 16 months after receiving it from the House.

This is the bill before you today.

H.R. 390 authorizes the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development and Secretary of State to direct humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery assistance to these communities to enable them to survive in Iraq and Syria.

It also authorizes the Secretary and Administrator to fund entities conducting criminal investigations into ISIS perpetrators who committed atrocity crimes in Iraq. The evidence these entities collect and preserve will be used to apprehend, prosecute, and convict perpetrators in a range of court settings.

The surviving religious and ethnic minority communities have begun to receive targeted aid from the United States under the leadership of Vice President Pence, USAID Administrator Green, and Secretary Pompeo. The governments of Hungary and Poland have also provided assistance to Christians and other religious minorities. But these communities remain imperiled.

Less than 200,000 Christians remain in Iraq, down from 1.4 million in 2002 and 500,000 in 2013 before ISIS began its genocidal rampage. Many of Christians still in Iraq are displaced, mostly in Erbil in the Kurdistan region, and need aid to enable them to stay in place if they are to have a chance of ever returning to their homes in the Nineveh Plains.

As Archbishop Warda told me today, “Christians in Iraq are still at the brink of extinction. H.R. 390 is vital to our survival. If it becomes law, implementation must be full and fast. Otherwise, the help it provides will be too late for us.”

According to the Yazdi organization Yazda, 60,000 Yezidis fled ISIS to Europe. Of 550,000 Yezidis still in Iraq, 280,000 remain displaced and only 20 percent have been able to return to their historic homeland of Sinjar. They also need aid now so they can eventually return to their homes.

Key perpetrators have also not yet been held accountable for their atrocity crimes of murder, torture, rape, slavery, and more.

The needs on the ground continue to outpace the generosity of private charities. More aid from the United States is desperately needed.

H.R. 390 provides clear, detailed authorization and direction for appropriations and the Executive Branch. The White House supports it.

Both chambers of Congress declared the genocide, the victims, and perpetrators in 2016. Secretaries of State from the current and previous administration made similar, formal declarations.

This bill is also supported by a wide range of religious, human rights, and accountability leaders and groups, including Nadia Murad, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Yezidi survivor of ISIS slavery, Yazda, and the Free Yezidi Foundation. Carl Anderson, who leads the Knights of Columbus, twice testified before my subcommittee on this

crisis. His testimony was the blueprint for the legislation and the Knights have been unflagging supporters of the bill.

In Defense of Christians, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Family Research Council, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative are among H.R. 390's other Christian stalwarts. The Religious Freedom Institute has been indispensable, and the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and Working Group on Christians and Religious Pluralism in the Middle East it convenes have also been proponents of the bill.

The great human rights champion, our former colleague Frank Wolf, has been one of the strongest supporters of H.R. 390. All four former U.S. Ambassadors-at-Large for War Crimes, David Scheffer, Pierre Prosper, Clint Williamson, and Stephen Rapp, support the legislation, as does the founding Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, David Crane, and the Commission for International Justice and Accountability.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Genocide Convention we ratified in 1988, genocide means specific "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." When genocide or other atrocity crimes are perpetrated, the United States should direct some of its humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery aid to enable these groups to survive—especially when they are minorities whose existence as a people is at-risk.

We should commit to such a response whether the victims are the Rohingya in Burma or Christians and Yezidis in Iraq and Syria.

H.R. 390 would codify this commitment and help ensure our actions match our words. The future of endangered religious and ethnic minorities targeted by ISIS for genocide, and pluralism in the Middle East, will depend on help from the United States. I hope that our efforts will be enough and in time.