

Canadian Rabbinic Caucus
45 O'Connor Street, Suite 730
Ottawa, ON
K1P 1A4

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
2500 Don Reid Drive
Ottawa, ON
K1H 2J2

December 15, 2015

The Honourable Stéphane Dion
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

We want to begin by offering our heartfelt congratulations and blessings to you on your appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs. That you have been chosen to represent Canadian values in the international community is a testament to your wealth of knowledge, experience, and commitment to our great country.

We are writing to express our profound concern for the ongoing and tragic plight of Christians throughout the Middle East and Africa. While we recognize that many religious and ethnic communities are subjected to prejudice in various countries, many observers have noted in recent years that Christians experience religious persecution more than any other faith group on a global scale and in absolute numbers.

According to a report published December 4, 2010, by the *Toronto Star*:

Virtually every human rights group and Western government agency that monitors the plight of Christians worldwide arrives at more or less the same conclusion: Between 200 million and 230 million of them face daily threats of murder, beating, imprisonment and torture, and a further 350 to 400 million encounter discrimination in areas such as jobs and housing.

The Pew Research Center released findings this past February 26 which confirm that Christians around the world face more persecution, restrictions, hostility and harassment than any other religious group (*Latest Trends in Religious Restrictions and Hostilities*; <http://www.pewforum.org/>). Similar findings are reported by Aid to the Church in Need which regularly issues extensive research on the situation of religious freedom around the world. Its most recent report, published in 2014, indicates that Christians remain the most persecuted faith in the world, with the highest levels of religious persecution found throughout many nations in

North Africa, the Middle East, and much of Asia (*Religious Freedom in the World Report – 2014*; <http://religion-freedom-report.org.uk/full-report/>).

Pope Francis has repeatedly called on the international community to protect Christians and other minorities who are being persecuted in the Middle East. Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly this past September 25, he renewed his *“repeated appeals regarding the painful situation of the entire Middle East, North Africa and other African countries, where Christians, together with other cultural or ethnic groups, and even members of the majority religion who have no desire to be caught up in hatred and folly, have been forced to witness the destruction of their places of worship, their cultural and religious heritage, their houses and property, and have faced the alternative either of fleeing or of paying for their adherence to good and to peace by their own lives, or by enslavement.”*

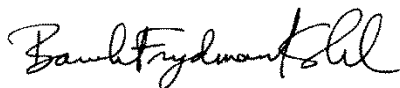
Observing how Christians are being persecuted throughout the Middle East, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, in a speech to the British House of Lords on July 16, 2015, called on *“people of all faiths and of none”* to *“stand together ... for we are all at risk.”* Both Pope Francis and Rabbi Sacks have described the persecution of Christians in parts of the Middle East and Africa as genocide.

From Egypt to Iran and from Iraq to Nigeria, Christian communities throughout the region experience persecution in various forms, ranging from state discrimination to intimidation by local populations to attacks by terror groups on churches. In some countries this has resulted in a veritable exodus of local Christians – an added tragedy given that many of these communities have existed for millennia in a region that is the birthplace of Christianity.

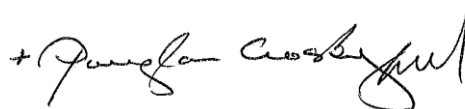
We recognize that you no doubt face an enormous array of competing policy imperatives. Nevertheless, we humbly request that the Government of Canada make a priority of advocating for at-risk Christian communities throughout the Middle East and Africa, and likewise explore new and effective ways of providing diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to alleviate their suffering.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent and dire matter, and look forward to your thoughts.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl
Co-Chair of the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus



(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton and
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops