President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write as an informal and diverse group of non-governmental organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders, and human rights advocates to urge you to declare the Islamic State’s systematic destruction of the ancient religious minority communities in Iraq and Syria including Christians—Assyrians/Chaldeans/Syriacs, Copts, etc.—Yazidis, Shia Muslims, Turkmen (Shia), Shabak and others to be genocide. Last October the International Religious Freedom Roundtable wrote to you regarding the genocide that is taking place and since that time the Islamic State has continued its reign of terror and destruction.

There is a growing chorus of political and faith leaders, genocide scholars, human rights experts and numerous Iraqi and Syrian, Christian and Yazidi firsthand testimonies recognizing that the most accurate description for the atrocities unfolding at the initiative of the Islamic State is genocide. On December 29, 2015, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, stated, “I am now sure we have enough evidence, what is happening is genocide deliberately aimed at destroying lives and wiping out the existence of Christians and other religious minorities.” We believe that without a formal declaration the U.S. Government has abdicated its duty and vow to confront the most heinous of human rights violations, namely genocide.

As you are aware, the Omnibus bill that you signed into law on December 18, 2015, contains a provision requiring Secretary Kerry to provide an evaluation to Congress of “the persecution of, including attacks against, Christians and people of other religions in the Middle East” and determine whether such attacks constitute genocide. This report is required within 90 days from the passage of the bill. Between now and March 16, 2016, your Administration has a tremendous opportunity to extend American leadership at a crucial time on behalf of the ancient religious and ethnic minority communities who are experiencing the most brutal reality imaginable—genocide.

In their most recent report, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq – Human Rights Office stated clearly that “ISIL continue to target members of different ethnic and religious communities,” expounding further “[t]hese acts appear to form part of a systematic and widespread policy that aims to suppress, permanently expel, or destroy many of these communities within ISIL areas of control.”

On February 4, 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution designating the crimes the Islamic State has committed against ethnic and religious minorities as genocide. In the declaration, they remind other signatories of the 1948 U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to acknowledge the crimes of the Islamic State and to coordinate with the larger international community. At this critical juncture, a designation of genocide by the United States would strengthen the actions of the international community and further extend American leadership.
Given the growing preponderance of evidence, it is now possible to categorically affirm that the Islamic State clearly demonstrates intent as well as acts based upon that intent to commit genocide against Christians—Assyrians/Chaldeans/Syriacs, Copts, etc.—Yazidis, Shia Muslims, Turkmen (Shia), Shabak and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria.

Illustrating this intent, for example, in October 2014 in the fourth issue of Dabiq, the Islamic State’s propaganda magazine, they featured a cover photo showing a black Islamic State flag flying over the Vatican and wrote:

And so we promise you [O crusaders] by Allah’s permission that this campaign will be your final campaign. It will be broken and defeated, just as all your previous campaigns were broken and defeated, except that this time we will raid you thereafter, and you will never raid us. We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. This is His promise to us; He is glorified and He does not fail in His promise. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market” [Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful].

More recently, in November 2015, Dabiq again restated the intention of the Islamic State:

And nothing changes for the Islamic State, as it will continue to pronounce takfīr upon the Jews, the Christians, the pagans, and the apostates from the Rāfidah, the Nusayriyyah, the Sahwah, and the tawāḥīdīt. It will continue to wage war against the apostates until they repent from apostasy. It will continue to wage war against the pagans until they accept Islam. It will continue to wage war against the Jewish state until the Jews hide behind their gharqad trees. And it will continue to wage war against the Christians until the truce decreed sometime before the Malhamah. Thereafter, the slave markets will commence in Rome by Allah’s power and might.

These statements of intent are matched with well-documented acts of destruction based upon that intent. This includes kidnapping, raping and enslaving Christian and Yazidi women; beheading Christians who refuse conversion; mass Yazidi graves; pillaging and wiping out traditional Christian and Yazidi communities; and destroying places of Christian and Yazidi worship, some of which had been in operation for more than one thousand years.

Designating the crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as genocide against Christians—Assyrians/Chaldeans/Syriacs, Copts, etc.—Yazidis, Shia Muslims, Turkmen (Shia), Shabak and other religious minority communities would build upon your 2015 National Security Strategy which acknowledges, “We have a strong interest in leading an international response to genocide and mass atrocities when they arise, recognizing options are more extensive and less costly when we act preventively before situations reach crisis proportions.” And which further promises, “We will work with the international community to prevent and call to account those responsible for the worst human rights abuses, including through support to the International Criminal Court, consistent with U.S. law and our commitment to protecting our personnel. Moreover, we will continue to mobilize allies and partners to strengthen our collective efforts to prevent and respond to mass atrocities using all our instruments of national power.”

Such a designation would further support your December 23, 2015, “Statement on Persecuted Christians at Christmas” where you rightly noted, “In some areas of the Middle East where church bells have rung for centuries on Christmas Day, this year they will be silent; this silence bears tragic witness to the brutal atrocities committed against these communities by ISIL.”
Mr. President, we urge you to designate the actions perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria against Christians—Assyrians/Chaldeans/Syriacs, Copts, etc.—Yazidis, Shia Muslims, Turkmen (Shia), Shabak and other religious minorities as genocide. Time and again the Islamic State has committed crimes with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the ethnic and religious minority communities of Iraq and Syria. The world is watching and clear moral leadership by your Administration is needed to declare and subsequently stop such atrocities in order to preserve these ancient communities. It is our belief that officially declaring and subsequently halting this genocide is a matter of vital moral and strategic importance for the United States, the international community, and the overall state of religious freedom around the world.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Chris Seiple
President Emeritus, Institute for Global Engagement
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21ST CENTURY WILBERFORCE INITIATIVE

AMERICAN MESOPOTAMIAN ORGANIZATION

AMERICAN SYRIAC UNION

AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BAHRAIN

ARMENIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF AMERICA

ASSYRIAN AMERICAN NATIONAL FEDERATION

ASSYRIAN UNIVERSAL ALLIANCE, AMERICAS CHAPTER

BETH NAHRAIN ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN IRAQ

BETHNAHRIN PATRIOTIC UNION IRAQ

BOAT PEOPLE SOS

CENTER FOR INQUIRY

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY NATIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

COPTIC SOLIDARITY

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