

I just want to stand in solidarity with the remarks of Mr. MEEKS of New York. We're both in complete agreement here, as we've discussed in the past, about how vital this relationship is with South Korea. It is one that, for decades, we've stood side-by-side as South Korea and the United States have tried to promote policies in that region in defense of freedom, to support democracy, to support human rights, and, at the same time, to support economic growth. I think it is just as important that we stand together to extend the U.S.-South Korea civilian nuclear energy agreement.

So I would urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation. I think it is critical not only to our friend and ally, but I would say, without this bill, tens of thousands of American workers would be at a grave disadvantage. This bill extends, without modification, the existing agreement between the U.S. and South Korea for 2 additional years so that the current negotiations can continue uninterrupted.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2449, thereby building upon the already strong relationship between the United States and South Korea by extending the current U.S.-Korea Civil Nuclear Agreement for another two years.

Mr. Speaker, Korea and the United States have a long and storied alliance stretching back sixty years, with many shared political and cultural values. Our current nuclear agreement is set to expire in 2014. Extending it is a mutually beneficial proposition, as past nuclear agreements with Korea have demonstrated. South Korea is one of the largest consumers of nuclear energy in the world, and U.S. companies export billions of dollars worth of equipment to Korea each year, while Korea uses nuclear power to increase its own energy independence. H.R. 2449 represents a new chapter in energy partnership between the U.S. and Korea and I look forward to its passage.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2449.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

□ 1700

PROVIDING FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL ENVOY

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 301) to provide for the establishment of the Special Envoy to Promote

Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 301

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) More than 500 Baha'is in Iran have been arbitrarily arrested since 2005. Roughly 100 Baha'is are presently imprisoned because of their religious beliefs.

(2) In May 2010, suspected terrorists attacked two mosques in Pakistan belonging to the Ahmaddiya minority Muslim sect, killing at least 80 people. Ahmadiis consider themselves Muslim, but Pakistani law does not recognize them as such.

(3) Said Musa, an Afghan Christian convert, was arrested in May 2010 on charges of apostasy, a crime which can carry the death sentence, and was released in February 2011 only after sustained international pressure.

(4) On October 31, 2010, gunmen laid siege on Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, Iraq, killing at least 52 police and worshippers, including two priests, making it the worst massacre of Iraqi Christians since 2003.

(5) Iraq's ancient and once vibrant Christian population that numbered an estimated 1,500,000 out of a total population in Iraq of 30,000,000 in 2003 has been reduced by at least one half, due in significant part to Christians fleeing the violence.

(6) In November 2010, a Pakistani court sentenced Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, to death under the country's blasphemy law for insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

(7) Since early 2011, violent sectarian attacks targeting Coptic Orthodox Christians and their property increased significantly, resulting in nearly 100 deaths, mostly Coptic Christians, surpassing the death toll of the 10 previous years combined.

(8) In Egypt, with the ascent of the Muslim Brotherhood, Coptic Christians, numbering 8 to 10 million, have been under increased threat and many are reported to have fled the country during former President Mohamed Morsi's rule.

(9) On March 2, 2011, Pakistani Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian member of the Cabinet, who was outspoken in his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws was assassinated by extremists.

(10) The former Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, Hannah Rosenthal, has noted that Holocaust glorification "is especially virulent in Middle Eastern media, some of which is state-owned and operated, which calls for a new Holocaust to finish the job".

(11) In the midst of a devastating civil war, Syrian Christians and other religious minorities, which comprise roughly 10 percent of the population, are particularly vulnerable lacking their own militias and regional protectors.

(12) Many of these ancient faith communities are being forced to flee the lands which they have inhabited for centuries.

(13) The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has recommended that Egypt, Tajikistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan be designated by the Department of State as Countries of Particular Concern in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

(14) The situation on the ground in the region continues to develop rapidly and the United States Government needs an indi-

vidual who can respond in kind and focus on the critical situation of religious minorities in these countries.

(15) There are historical precedents, including the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, the Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues, and the South Sudan and Sudan Special Envoy, for the Department of State, either as a result of legislative mandate or initiative of the Secretary of State, to create positions with a targeted focus on an area or issue of recognized import.

SEC. 2. SPECIAL ENVOY TO PROMOTE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN THE NEAR EAST AND SOUTH CENTRAL ASIA.

(a) APPOINTMENT.—The President shall appoint a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia (in this Act referred to as the "Special Envoy") within the Department of State.

(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—The Special Envoy should be a person of recognized distinction in the field of human rights and religious freedom and with expertise in the Near East and South Central Asia regions. The Special Envoy shall have the rank of ambassador and shall hold the office at the pleasure of the President.

(c) PROHIBITION.—The person appointed as Special Envoy may not hold any other position of Federal employment for the period of time during which the person holds the position of Special Envoy.

SEC. 3. DUTIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Special Envoy shall carry out the following duties:

(1) Promote the right of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia, denounce the violation of such right, and recommend appropriate responses by the United States Government when such right is violated.

(2) Monitor and combat acts of religious intolerance and incitement targeted against religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(3) Work to ensure that the unique needs of religious minority communities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia are addressed, including the economic and security needs of such communities to the extent that such needs are directly tied to religious-based discrimination and persecution.

(4) Work with foreign governments of the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia to address laws that are inherently discriminatory toward religious minority communities in such countries.

(5) Coordinate and assist in the preparation of that portion of the report required by sections 116(d) and 502B(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151n(d) and 2304(b)) relating to the nature and extent of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(6) Coordinate and assist in the preparation of that portion of the report required by section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6412(b)) relating to the nature and extent of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(b) COORDINATION.—In carrying out the duties under subsection (a), the Special Envoy shall, to the maximum extent practicable, coordinate with the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the Department of State, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the United

States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and other relevant Federal agencies and officials.

SEC. 4. DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION.

Subject to the direction of the President and the Secretary of State, the Special Envoy is authorized to represent the United States in matters and cases relevant to religious freedom in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia in—

(1) contacts with foreign governments, intergovernmental organizations, and specialized agencies of the United Nations, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other international organizations of which the United States is a member; and

(2) multilateral conferences and meetings relevant to religious freedom in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

SEC. 5. PRIORITY COUNTRIES AND CONSULTATION.

(a) **PRIORITY COUNTRIES.**—In carrying out this Act, the Special Envoy shall give priority to programs, projects, and activities for Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

(b) **CONSULTATION.**—The Special Envoy shall consult with domestic and international nongovernmental organizations and multilateral organizations and institutions, as the Special Envoy considers appropriate to fulfill the purposes of this Act.

SEC. 6. FUNDING.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Of the amounts made available for “Diplomatic and Consular Programs” for fiscal years 2014 through 2018, \$1,000,000 is authorized to be appropriated for each such fiscal year to carry out the provisions of this Act.

(b) **FUNDING OFFSET.**—To offset the costs to be incurred by the Department of State to carry out the provisions of this Act for fiscal years 2014 through 2018, the Secretary of State shall eliminate such positions within the Department of State, unless otherwise authorized or required by law, as the Secretary determines to be necessary to fully offset such costs.

(c) **LIMITATION.**—No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated for “Diplomatic and Consular Programs” to carry out the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 7. SUNSET.

This Act shall cease to be effective beginning on October 1, 2018.

The **SPEAKER** pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. MEEKS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and that they also might have the ability to include extraneous material on this resolution in the RECORD.

The **SPEAKER** pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of this legislation because this legislation provides for a very needed Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities

in the Near East and in South Central Asia.

This bill, introduced by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF), is substantially identical to one which we brought up last year and tried to get out of both bodies; it was H.R. 440. This body passed that legislation by more than 400 votes.

Sadly, in the 2 years that have elapsed since then, the dangers motivating this bill have only grown more acute. In many areas of the Middle East, the first freedom, as we called it, the freedom of religious liberty, is disregarded.

Minority communities are not merely under threat; those communities are now under attack. From Afghanistan, to Iran, to Syria, to Egypt and elsewhere in these regions, religious minorities have been increasingly subjected to unconscionable—often violent—persecution. These alarming trends are occurring in the midst of growing regional instability as brutal regimes and terrorists and insurgents seek to assert control over populations and seek to enforce their ideologies by use of fear, by use of brute force.

As the bloody civil war rages in Syria, ancient Christian communities are being forced to flee the lands they have inhabited for centuries in the midst of this bloody civil conflict.

In Egypt, Coptic Christians have experienced unspeakable abuses at the hands of radical Muslim groups and have been fleeing their country in droves to escape further violence. I have met with many from the vibrant Coptic Christian community in southern California.

In Iran, more than 500 Baha'is have been arbitrarily arrested since 2005 by the Iranian Government. In Pakistan, 80 members of the Muslim Ahmadiyya sect were killed by terrorists in their places of worship in 2010, in addition to consistent incidents of violence and even judicial persecution of Christians there. Many of us are aware of the violations of the rights and the deaths of the Shi'a minority there as well.

For all of these alarming reasons, this legislation is at least as timely as it was 2 years ago. I commend our colleague, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF), for bringing it to our attention.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this bill and yield myself such time as I may consume.

This bipartisan legislation creates a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. Housed at the State Department, the Special Envoy would be responsible for monitoring and combating acts of religious intolerance, engaging with foreign governments to address laws that discriminate against religious minorities, and working to ensure that the unique needs of religious minority communities are being addressed.

This bill is important because religious minority communities all around

the world—particularly in the Near East and South Central Asia—are facing increased attacks and persecution. For example, Egypt's recent governments have failed to prevent, investigate, or prosecute crimes against members of religious minority groups, especially Coptic Christians. Churches have been burned to the ground and numerous Christians murdered.

Iraq used to have a significant number of religious minorities. These groups have been subject to escalating violence, persecution, and discrimination for their religious beliefs, and today they comprise only about 3 percent of Iraq's population. By some estimates, half of Iraq's Christian population has fled since 2003.

In Iran, the arrest and harassment of members of religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims and Christians, continues to rise. In one notable case last year, an Iranian-American Christian pastor was imprisoned for threatening Iranian national security. And what was his crime? Helping to set up small churches in people's homes. Iran's minority Baha'i community is particularly harassed, punished, imprisoned, and even killed simply because of their religion.

This past August, a Baha'i community leader in Bandar Abbas, Iran—Mr. Ataollah Rezvani—was found murdered in his car on the outskirts of the city, shot in the back of the head. He had been the subject of threats and pressure from agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, and until shortly before his death he had been receiving menacing phone calls from unidentified persons. There is little doubt that his murder was religiously motivated. Until now, the Iranian Government has not begun a formal investigation into his murder or the murder of many other Baha'is that have been killed in recent years. It is past time for the Iranian Government to move immediately to seek justice for the cruel deaths of its Baha'i citizens. I wish these were isolated cases, but countless other examples exist, from Afghanistan to India to Saudi Arabia.

We indeed are fortunate to live in a country that was founded by religious refugees on principles of tolerance. But it is important that we do everything we can to ensure that religious minorities elsewhere in the world enjoy the freedoms and protections they deserve—the freedoms and protections enjoyed by all Americans. Appointing this Special Envoy would be an important step in that direction, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF), chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science, cochairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, author of this bill, and long a spokesman for religious freedom for those of all creeds.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking Chairman ROYCE for

swiftly moving the bill and for his comments today. I also thank the Republican leadership for recognizing that this simple but critical legislation is worthy of making it a priority by this Congress, even as there are other issues that face us at this time.

In January 2011, following a spate of attacks against Christians in Iraq and ongoing persecution in Egypt, I convened a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing focusing on the plight of religious minorities in Egypt and Iraq. Among the witnesses was Representative ANNA ESHOO, who ultimately became the lead Democrat on this bill for two consecutive Congresses.

During the hearing we heard sobering testimony about the challenges facing these communities. A resounding theme emerged: Chaldo-Assyrian Christians and Coptic Christians were being marginalized and targeted for violence. These realities were all the more troubling given the historic roots of the faith communities in these two countries—amazingly, many Iraqi Christians today still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus.

Not only were these communities being threatened in the lands they had inhabited for centuries, their plight was largely unknown and seemingly unimportant within the broader foreign policy apparatus. Notably, at the time of the hearing, the post of the U.S. Ambassador for International Religious Freedom had been vacant for 2 years.

While the hearing predated the so-called “Arab Spring,” without question the dramatic changes in the region have only further jeopardized these communities. I was convinced then and remain convinced today that religious minorities in the Middle East and in key countries in South Central Asia, such as Pakistan—as the chairman mentioned—and Afghanistan need someone who can be their voice both within the halls of Foggy Bottom and abroad with foreign governments.

Last Congress, this legislation overwhelmingly passed the House only to stall in the Senate in the face of opposition by the State Department—the same State Department which to date has failed to designate any Countries of Particular Concern for egregious religious freedom violations since August of 2011.

The administration’s opposition is shortsighted and, frankly, indefensible. As we debate this legislation, Coptic Christians are leaving Egypt in droves. As we debate this legislation, several Baha’i leaders languish unjustly in an Iranian prison, as does American citizen Saeed Abedini.

As we debate this legislation, Ahmadi Muslims, as the chairman said, in Pakistan are prohibited from voting and their graves are desecrated. As we debate this legislation, Syrian Christians fear they too will be caught in a crossfire like Iraqi Christians, or worse yet, like the Iraqi Jewish community. I

am told only a single Jewish person remains in the country today where once a vibrant Jewish community flourished.

This legislation is supported by such diverse groups as faith-based organizations, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, United Methodist Church, The Ahmadi Muslim community, Southern Baptist Convention, and Christians United for Israel, among others, as well as a multitude of diaspora organizations which are directly linked with the very people the Special Envoy would serve.

Will a Special Envoy guarantee these communities’ survival—and even flourishing? I do not know. But I am certain that to do nothing is not an option—lest on this administration’s and this Congress’ watch we witness a Middle East emptied of ancient faith communities, foremost among them the “Sunday People.”

German Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, faced with the tyranny of and horror of Nazism, famously said: “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

I want to thank the chairman again, Mr. ROYCE, and urge my colleagues to join me in sending an undeniable message to persecuted people of faith the world over—and just as importantly to the forces that oppress them—that America, this shining city on the hill as envisioned by our Founders, will not be silent in the face of evil.

Please vote “yes” on H.R. 301.

Mr. MEEK. Mr. Speaker, at this time I am happy to yield 3 minutes to the coauthor of this bill, the gentlelady from California (Ms. ESHOO).

Ms. ESHOO. I want to begin by thanking the ranking member. I also want to thank the chairman of the committee, and most especially my colleague and friend, Congressman WOLF.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 301, a bill that will create a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia.

This legislation responds, as has been said so eloquently by those that spoke before me, to the urgent needs of Christians and other religious minorities who are really under siege in the Middle East precisely because they are Christians and because they are minorities.

In light of the ongoing events in Syria, this legislation could not be more timely. I commend Representative FRANK WOLF, whom I have worked closely with as cochair of the Religious Minorities Caucus, for his partnership in this effort. Most importantly, I thank him for his conscience.

We first introduced this legislation in 2011 after Congressman WOLF chaired a hearing to review the violence and the hardship faced by Middle Eastern religious minorities. I testified that day about the plight of who I am descended

from, the Assyrians—the world’s oldest Christians who have fled and continue to flee Iraq.

We agreed to press forward with this legislation to create a Special Envoy at the State Department, the ambassador level, to elevate this issue for the attention that it deserves. The United States of America needs a high-level official dedicated to religious freedom in the region and committed to addressing the concerns of minority communities.

Appropriately, H.R. 301 has attracted solid bipartisan support, with 68 cosponsors calling for the State Department to elevate religious freedom in the Middle East as a diplomatic priority of our country.

□ 1715

Just as Senator John Danforth served our Nation as Special Envoy to Sudan and Senator George Mitchell Special Envoy to Northern Ireland, religious minorities in the Middle East require and deserve a high-level authoritative voice to address their situation.

The history of violence against Christians in the Middle East must not be allowed to repeat itself, and it is. Notably, Syria’s ancient Christian population, which makes up 10 percent of the country, has been forced to flee their ancestral homeland, as noted in today’s New York Times in a lengthy article.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield the gentlelady an additional 2 minutes.

Ms. ESHOO. Churches have been, and continue to be, attacked and sacred objects ransacked, and the very lives of those that stand against this are being threatened.

The Christians of Syria, as well as Iraq, Iran, Israel, and Egypt, are the oldest in the world. Christianity was from the beginning a Middle Eastern religion. The Assyrian Christians, the Chaldeans, actually celebrate mass in Aramaic, which is the language Jesus spoke. For more than 2,000 years, Christians have been a key part of the Middle Eastern community.

From the founding of our Nation, religious freedom has been a pillar of our democracy, and it remains one of the great hallmarks of our country.

I urge all my colleagues to join me in supporting this critical legislation to create a Special Envoy focused on the freedom and survival of these ancient faith communities, and I thank Representative WOLF most especially for his tireless advocacy.

I also thank the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for supporting this legislation and for writing to every Member of the House urging their full support, as well as the honor roll of faith-based organizations who support the legislation.

Let us go forward and send a very clear message, not only to the other legislative body, but also to people

around the world, that we remain the beacon of hope and light and that we uphold this pillar of religious freedom, not only in our own Nation but in countries around the world where people of faith are under siege.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

In closing, let me thank the authors of this bill, Mr. WOLF and Ms. ESHOO, for your dedication, your focus, and your hard work.

It would seem that in the year of our Lord 2013 we would learn religious tolerance by now all over the world, we would have learned that it is the right thing to do to be patient with individuals who might believe different than we do, to allow them their way of life so that they can prosper and grow and pray in their own beliefs. Unfortunately, that's not true. For all of us, we should be concerned wherever religious tolerance is not adhered to.

I recall the words—and why it concerns us—Dr. King said once that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” If we allow minorities who believe differently than we do anywhere to think that it is okay, and we are not going to use whatever diplomatic or other forms of relationships that we have to try to have religious freedoms, they're mistaken. We must not allow our voices to be silent, we must speak aloud in clear language, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, in the spirit that Mr. MEEKS articulated there, we Americans who cherish religious liberty and all people of goodwill who value the rights of conscience cannot remain silent in the face of this rising regional intolerance. I think, as he put it, and as Mr. WOLF and Ms. ANNA ESHOO put so eloquently, I think it is time to bring about this Special Envoy to deploy in the Middle East. I thank Mr. WOLF for his leadership and certainly urge passage of H.R. 301.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 301, legislation to provide for the establishment of the Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. I want to thank my colleagues Congressman WOLF and Congresswoman ESHOO for introducing this important legislation, which I am proud to cosponsor.

Ethno-religious minorities face serious threats in many countries in the Middle East, and it is critical that U.S. policy is sensitive to the needs and concerns of those endangered communities. Years of warfare, as well as specific persecution and targeting minority groups, has taken a serious toll on once-vibrant communities. While there were once over 1.5 million Christians in Iraq, today there are less than 400,000.

In October 2010, an attack on the Our Lady of Salvation Assyrian Catholic Church in Baghdad left more than 50 clergy, worshipers and police dead. This brutal massacre, just

one of many in recent years, drew international outrage and condemnation. We need a clear strategy for the protection of targeted minority communities.

My district in the Chicagoland area has a large and vibrant Assyrian population. In recent years, they have been extremely active in calling for greater attention to the ongoing persecution and targeting of their brothers and sisters in the Middle East, including a large march in Chicago in the wake of the 2010 Baghdad massacre. I am proud to work with them on this issue and to push to see H.R. 301 enacted into law.

Today's legislation will ensure that this serious issue is given the high-level attention it deserves within the State Department. A Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia will be a voice for persecuted communities, ensuring that U.S. policy is responsive to their needs. It is a critical step toward protecting these ancient and vibrant communities, and toward ensuring a peaceful and secure future for all residents of the region.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important bill.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise as a cosponsor of H.R. 301, a bill to establish a Special Envoy to promote religious freedom for minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia and to applaud Representative FRANK WOLF for his leadership on this timely and important issue.

No one should be made to feel that the practice of their religion is a crime or a source of shame. When people are persecuted in the name of one religion against another, such persecution violates their inalienable right to worship as they choose and promotes political instability. Around the world, many conflicts are rooted in sectarian differences and rivalries. Today in Syria, Christians and other religious minorities are in direct peril and are the target of abuse and persecution as a result of the civil war. On April 22, 2013, Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo Boulose Yazigi and the Syriac Archbishop of Aleppo, Yohanna Ibrahim were kidnapped by a faction of rebel extremists while carrying out humanitarian work in the area around the city. To this day they remain missing.

To the extent the United States can promote religious tolerance, we advance the cause of human rights, justice and peace around the globe. This bill creates a special envoy in order to monitor and combat acts of religious intolerance and incitement targeted against religious minorities and to work with foreign governments to address laws that are inherently discriminatory toward religious minority communities.

I encourage my colleagues to support of H.R. 301. By helping protect minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia, we contribute to the safety of minorities all over the world who live in fear for their lives merely because they practice a different religion than those around them.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 301, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES REVITALIZATION AND REFORM ACT OF 2013

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (S. 793) to support revitalization and reform of the Organization of American States, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

S. 793

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Organization of American States Revitalization and Reform Act of 2013”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) The Charter of the Organization of American States recognizes that—

(A) representative democracy is indispensable for the stability, peace, and development of the Western Hemisphere; and

(B) a purpose of the Organization of American States is to promote and consolidate representative democracy, with due respect for the principle of nonintervention.

(2) The United States supports the purposes and principles enshrined in—

(A) the Charter of the Organization of American States;

(B) the Inter-American Democratic Charter; and

(C) the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man.

(3) The United States supports the Organization of American States in its efforts with all member states to meet our commitments under the instruments set forth in paragraph (2).

(4) Congress supports the Organization of American States as it operates in a manner consistent with the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It is the policy of the United States—

(1) to promote democracy and the rule of law throughout the Western Hemisphere;

(2) to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Western Hemisphere; and

(3) to support the practices, purposes, and principles expressed in the Charter of the Organization of American States, the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, and other fundamental instruments of democracy.

SEC. 4. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) the Organization of American States (OAS) should be the primary multi-lateral diplomatic entity for regional dispute resolution and promotion of democratic governance and institutions;

(2) the OAS is a valuable platform from which to launch initiatives aimed to benefit the countries of the Western Hemisphere;