EXPRESSING CONDOLENCE OF THE HOUSE ON THE DEATH OF MOTHER TERESA OF CALUTTA

SPEECH OF
HON. GIL GUTKNECHT
OF MINNESOTA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, September 11, 1997

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, over 50 years ago, Mother Teresa left a comfortable position in the Calcutta parish, and she has been involved with our administration committee for many years.”

McDonald said, “He helped with our church’s recent renovation and is working with us now on the new parish center gym. He is planning to build. To me, his knowledge of the village here and the people has been invaluable. And he’s a very humble man.”

Devlin, who will celebrate his 76th birthday in January, appears to be far from slowing down. He recently began his fifth term as a village trustee, a job he has held for 16 years since stepping down as mayor. He plays tennis and rides a bicycle and plays racquetball and handball. Devlin said he recently taught himself to play left handed because arthritis and bursitis have limited the mobility of his right shoulder.

“We are very sad to hear of the passing of Mr. Gutknecht’s mother. We will miss her smile, her warm handshake, and her kind words. She was a valued member of our community and will be missed dearly.”}

THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION ACT OF 1997

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON
OF INDIANA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Tuesday, September 16, 1997

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, the Committee on International Relations met last week to hear testimony on H.R. 2431 (formerly H.R. 1685), the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act of 1997. The list of witnesses heard by the committee is a reflection of the strong interest generated by this legislation among human rights groups and religious and public policy organizations worldwide.

For those of my colleagues who have not yet had an opportunity to study this bill, I want to share a letter submitted to the committee for inclusion in the hearing record from the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

I hope my colleagues will find this thoughtful statement useful as the debate on this legislation moves forward:

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA

To: Members of the House International Relations Committee.

From: Oliver Thomas, NCCC Special Counsel.


Date: September 11, 1997.

Senator Arlin Specter (R-PA) and Representative Frank Wolf (R-VA) have introduced legislation (H.R. 1685/S. 772) to address the persecution of Christians overseas. Mr. Wolf has written to the General Secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCC) soliciting the NCCC’s support for his bill.

There are a number of reasons why the NCCC and its member communions cannot support the Wolf/Specter bills as they are currently written, but should continue to pray and to take action to end religious persecution on their own terms. That is to say, the NCCC should remain committed to seeking justice and peace for all people and to carry on its work and witness in a manner consistent with its own responsibility as an ecumenical body, the World Council of Churches, for the common cause of the Kingdom of God.

As the nation’s oldest and largest national ecumenical body, the NCCC must continue to emphasize the importance of bearing collective witness to religious liberty. This means working cooperatively with Jews, Muslims, and other faith communities as well as with those in the Christian community. Our conversations with those in other faith communities indicate that many have strong reservations about Mr. Wolf’s and Mr. Specter’s bills.

Before addressing the specifics of H.R. 1685, I would point out that the persecution of Christians must be viewed in the larger context of religious persecution generally. There are a number of human rights abuses. God’s commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves compels us to seek religious freedom for all—not just for Christians, but for Jews and others as well. Therefore, embrace the Universal Declaration of Rights which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Second, I could not agree more about the need for focused, fervent prayer on behalf of the persecuted members of God’s human family. Far from silent, the NCCC and its international counterpart, the World Council of Churches, have long participated in prayer on behalf of our Christian brothers and sisters who suffer persecution. That is why, for example, we support the World Day of Prayer Against Religious Persecution sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship, and the International Day of Prayer for Religious Freedom.

Turning to the specific concerns about H.R. 1685, S. 772, I begin with one aspect of the bill that warrants our support:

Reports—The bill requires reports on religious persecution abroad are extremely useful to the United States Government as well as to the general public. Americans need to know when foreign regimes are guilty of human rights abuses in order that we may respond accordingly. Fortunately, the State Department has begun this practice.

Asspects of the bill to which we are opposed include:

1. Creation of the Office of Religious Persecution Monitoring in the White House—The NCCC General Secretary has stated that this U.S. government office charged with primary responsibility for addressing religious persecution should, in so far as possible, be insulated from partisan political pressure. For that reason, we would oppose any suggestion that those who monitor religious persecution should be located in the White House. We believe that the person most qualified to monitor and report on religious persecution are the State Department as the recent report “United States Policies In Support Of Religious Freedom’s Goals On Christians” demonstrates. We also support the use of an advisory committee reflecting...