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

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 teaching position at a Catholic high school to spend the rest of her life, as she said, caring for the sick, the poor, and the homeless on the streets of Calcutta. She began alone, following the call of the Cross, but her example inspired thousands to join her in service in 25 countries around the world.

I have often told the story of a news reporter who followed Mother Teresa for a few days as she worked among Calcutta's dead and dying, cleaning their sores and comforting them in their last days. Finally the exasperated reporter asked her how she could possibly continue, with more dead and dying every day, saying "You cannot possibly succeed!" "I was not called to succeed," Mother Teresa quietly replied. "I was called to serve."

Being present to see Mother Teresa receive the Congressional Medal of Honor earlier this year was one of the most memorable moments of my life. As she said it, "Today is not only bread, but hungry for love."

Though she was less than 5 feet tall, her humble, unswerving devotion to the truth made her a towering giant of the 20th century. She was the living Christ-like person of this era; the embodiment of Matthew 20:26.

VOTE CLARIFICATION ON ISTOOK AMENDMENT IN THE LABOR, HHS APPROPRIATIONS ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1998

HON. BUD SHUSTER
OF PENNSYLVANIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Tuesday, September 16, 1997

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to clarify my position with regard to two votes I made on September 9, 1997. The votes were rollcall Nos. 378 and 379, concerning Mr. ISTOOK's amendment No. 3 to the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Act for fiscal year 1998. My vote on rollcall No. 378, Mr. CASTLE's substitute to Mr. ISTOOK's amendment, was recorded as aye. I voted in support of Mr. ISTOOK's language, and will continue in the future to maintain the position that a child and parent relationship should not be undermined by legislative means.

THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION ACT OF 1997

SPEECH OF
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 long 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 nationwide.

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: Rev. Thomas, NCCC Social Concerns Council


Date: May 12, 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 U.S.A. (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 bill as it is currently written, but should continue to pray and to take action to end religious persecution on their own terms. That is to say, this bill should remain focused on 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 institution. If common and consistent with the understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the nation's oldest and largest national ecumenical body, the NCCC may choose 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 bill.

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 and the protection 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 and our religious brothers and sisters. 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 Cycle of Prayer developed through the World Council of Churches.

Turning to the specifics of the bill that warrants our support:

Reports—Annual 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 to correspond accordingly. Fortunately, the State Department has begun this practice.

Aspects 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 the U.S. government office charged with primary responsibility for addressing religious persecution should be located in the White House. We believe that the personnel most qualified to monitor and report on religious persecution are at the State Department as the recent report "United States Policies In Support of Religious Liberty: "Hearts On Christians" demonstrates. We also support the use of an advisory committee reflecting
the religious pluralism of our country as with current practice rather than the ap-
pointment of a single individual charged with responsibility for the task. America's reli-
gious pluralism is simply too diverse a reality to expect one person to represent all of our con-
cerns adequately. Minority religious commu-
nities are often the ones most vulnerable to
mistratreatment and thus especially need to be
included.

2. Automatic Sanctions—The bill’s ap-
proach to sanctions is overly simplistic. Amer-
icans must work in close partnership with
people of faith in countries where perse-
cution is occurring. How do they say we and
our government can best be helpful? Would
sanctions help, or would they hurt the wrong
people? Should we, and how, protect our pres-
sure and protest? Clearly, sanctions should
not be ruled out as a means to address reli-
gious persecution, but they should not be an
automatic or first option.

3. Asylum Provisions—This legislation
would change the refugee determination
process to give special attention to those
being singled out for persecution on the basis of
religion. Under both international conven-
tions and U.S. refugee law, there are five
grounds for being granted refugee status:
persecution on the basis of race, nationality,
religion, membership in a social group, and
political opinion. We do not support singling
out religion as being more important than
those other forms of persecution. Moreover,
over time we have not supported the ignon-
ation of groups as refugees for resettlement,
but rather have advocated for a case-
by-case review of individual claims.

Obviously, there are people who leave their
communities because they are persecuted for
their religious faith and those people should
find the protection they need—
whether in a neighboring country of asylum
or in the United States through resettlement.
But this is already part of international and
national law. Singling out persecution of
Christians as somehow being worse than per-
cussion of political dissidents or a particu-
lar ethnic group undermines a lot of this
international law we have worked so hard to
get implemented.

What we advocate is better application of
existing law so that all of those claiming
persecution get a fair hearing and that the
adjudication procedures are both just and
human.

Finally, we believe some measure of humili-
ity is required as we act to stop religious
persecution outside the United States. This
is particularly urgent in light of the commu-
nications the NCCC has received from Chris-
tians in Egypt, China and other nations who
express concern over America’s eagerness to
impose its political and constitutional ideals
on others. As the General Secretary has stat-
ed: “Although we cherish the American
model of religious liberty and its meaning for
us, we recognize that it is not the only model.
Some of our most trusted friends in the
world of community worship and serve God
in state churches. Others see toleration,
rather than full freedom, as the touchstone
for religious rights. In short, due consider-
ation of the need to balance cultural values and
existing religious life, especially on such
matters as world missions, proselytizing and
areas of permissible regulations.

In the vicissitudes of religious freedom to the level of persecu-
And, even when they do, we must be
careful to act in a way that alleviates rather
than aggravates the problem.

For that reason, the NCCC and its member
communions should consider an idea that
has been proposed by members of the United
States Senate: the establishment of a Com-
misson on Security and Cooperation in Asia
modeled after its European counterpart.
Such a commission might be the forum
where citizens of the United States can com-
press their legitimate concerns about reli-
gious persecution in that region without fur-
ther aggravating the problem.

In sum, the NCCC maintains its commit-
ment to human rights and religious freedom
for all persons. We believe this can be
achieved through a variety of means includ-
ing prayer, reporting, dialogue, protests,
boycotts, and even diplomatic pressure, and,
in some cases, sanctions. We urge Con-
gress and the Administration to use their
tools to better enforce existing na-
tional laws or seek new me-
sures to protect individuals from religious persecu-
tion. Although H.R. 1685/S.772 have some sec-
tions the NCCC could support, other sections
(particularly 5 and 7) are highly objection-
able. For that reason, the NCCC cannot sup-
port H.R. 1685/S.772 until and unless signifi-
cant changes are made.

SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO ASBURY
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 16, 1997

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, the Asbury United Methodist Church, celebrating 161
years in the Washington, DC community, is conducting its 11th annual homecoming
September 23 through 28, 1997. Asbury’s extraordi-
inary history and contributions warrant praise and honor from this body and I ask that you
join me in rendering that honor today.

Asbury United Methodist Church was orga-
nized in 1836 when a group led by Eli Nugent
left the Foundry Methodist Church to form its
own congregation. The first Asbury Church
was a white frame building on the same site
as the current Asbury Church edifice.

Mr. Speaker, Asbury’s growth and history
are intricately wov-

en with that of African-
American history. The 1860’s brought

civil war. Asbury opened its doors to
provide space for classrooms for the fleeing and newly
freed slaves. Operated under the auspices of
various freedmen’s aid societies, schools
and classes helped provide the basic education
needed if former slaves were to survive eman-
cipation. These programs continued through
the early 1870’s.

Asbury’s leadership remained in the hands of
whites until the time of the emancipation.
The Washington Annual Conference
was founded in 1864. Asbury’s role and leadership
was established.

As a black congregation was firmly established
with the appointment of the first black pastor,
Rev. James Harper. Asbury experienced its
most growth during the Reconstruction era.
New organizations and programs were added
and by the 1880’s the Sunday school and
choir received frequent mention in the press.
This growth was accompanied by both mis-
sionary efforts and doctrinal disputes which
led to the formation of other congregations
that separated from the main body. These
were Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion
in 1847, Simpson Methodist Episcopal in 1875, and Peoples Congregational in 1891.

Mr. Speaker, with the dynamic leadership of
ministers, Rev. J.W.E. Bowen, Rev. I.L. Thom-
as, and Rev. Matthew Clair, Sr., Asbury added
new programs, expanded its services, and
built a new edifice. By 1915, with a member-
ship of over 1,000 the structure built in 1866
could no longer contain the church body.

Under the leadership of Reverend Clair, the
old building was replaced with a two story
structure of Gothic design.

By the early decades of the 20th century,
with its emphasis on social justice, enlightened
efforts on behalf of the race and a range of
programs for the education and social im-
provements of its youth, Asbury was attracting
Washington, DC’s most prominent citizens.

The press described it as the “National
Church of Negro Modernism.”

Mr. Speaker, the heritage and traditions that
shaped Asbury’s illustrious history continue to
inspire its current membership. Asbury has es-

established programs for the hungry from the
soup kitchen of the 1930’s to its food pantry
in the 1980’s. Its activities for transients and
the homeless includes regularly scheduled
breakfast and an outreach center which dis-
tributes clothing and personal items. It has op-
erated the Asbury Federal Credit Union since
the 1950’s and the educational building, which

heard the Child Development Center was
completed in 1973. Asbury Dwellings contains
147 apartments for senior citizens and handi-
capped individuals. The church once operated
community centers in Washington, DC and
supported a church and school in Sierra
Leone, West Africa. Asbury now provides sup-
port to Africa University in Zimbabwe and to
TransAfrica.

Asbury was placed in the DC Inventory of
Historic Sites in 1984 and was listed in the
National Register of Historic Places on No-

vember 1, 1986. During its 150th anniversary,
an endowment was established to support
programs in education, outreach, history, and
heritage. A history center was established to
collect, preserve and disseminate Asbury’s

history.

Mr. Speaker, the leadership of pastors such as
Bishop Matthew W. Clair and the Rev-
sor Roberts Roten Moten, Williams, James D. Foy,
Frank L. Williams, and Joshua Hutchins and
the commitment of the membership are very
much in evidence today. This legacy continues
under Asbury’s present senior minister, Dr.
Eugene Matthews who was appointed in 1992.

Asbury’s members now number 1,700 and
routinely extends itself into the community-at-
large through programs of the Washington Interfaith Network [WIN] and the Holy
Boldness activities envisioned by
Bishop Felton E. May of the Baltimore-Wash-
ington Conference. Asbury is also a leader in
the United Methodist community with its em-
phasis on Discipleship Bible Study, Conven-
ent Discipleship, and class leader programs.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that this body join me in
saluting the Asbury United Methodist Church
with its emphasis on social justice, enlightened
efforts on behalf of the race and a range of
programs for the education and social im-
provements of its youth. Asbury was attracting
Washington, DC’s most prominent citizens.

The press described it as the “National
Church of Negro Modernism.”

Mr. Speaker, the heritage and traditions that
shaped Asbury’s illustrious history continue to
inspire its current membership. Asbury has es-