EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES OF THE HOUSE ON THE DEATH OF MOTHER TERAesa 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 teaching position at a Catholic high school to work among the drug addicts, lepers, and 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 during her acceptance speech, “The world today is hungry not only for bread but hungry for love.”

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

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 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: 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 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. 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 vigilant to seek 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 in the understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the nation’s oldest and largest national ecumenical body, the NCCC can 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 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 human rights abuses. God’s commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves compels us to seek religious freedom for all—not just for those within our own faith traditions. 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, 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 H.R. 1685, S. 772, I begin with one aspect 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, in so far as possible, be insulated from partisan political pressures. For that reason, we would oppose any suggestion that those who monitor religious persecution should be located in the White House.

2. Establishment of a Religious Persecution Office—As the nation’s oldest and largest national ecumenical body, the NCCC’s involvement in religious persecution is demonstrated in its “Pray for Our Brothers and Sisters On Christians” demonstrates. We also support the use of an advisory committee reflecting...