

fill a quarter of slots for the incoming class from the expanded pool of qualified, geographically-diverse applicants received through the congressional nominations process. Then, in each subsequent academic year, half of the slots in each incoming class would have to be filled through the congressional nominations process.

My legislation will not require the Coast Guard to lower its student selection criteria or increase the size of the student population. To the contrary, it anticipates that the Coast Guard will utilize its criteria to select the best candidates from the pool of Member-nominated candidates for half of the slots in the incoming class, just as it will do to fill the slots in the other half of the incoming class. My legislation simply seeks to make Congress a partner in helping to put talented young people—from every corner of the country—on the path to a rewarding career in the U.S. Coast Guard.

I urge support of this commonsense, bipartisan legislation.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 15, 2011

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Mr. Speaker, due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to vote on the Conference report to H.R. 1540, the National Defense Authorization Act of FY2012 on December 14, 2011. I would like to have it reflected in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD that if I had the opportunity to vote on H.R. 1540, I would have voted “aye.”

COPTIC CHRISTIANS UNDER ATTACK

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 15, 2011

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, Christians in Egypt are under attack. The revolution may have overthrown a longtime dictator, but it has not freed Christians there from decades of persecution. In fact, it may have made matters worse.

Christians in Egypt are a deeply rooted minority of about 10 million in a largely Muslim society of 81 million. Prior to the revolution, they had a hard time. Discrimination was not an official policy of the Mubarak regime—he didn’t want to lose his aid dollars the U.S. was giving him—but he sure made it hard on Christians. When Christians wanted to build a new church or renovate their own, they had to get a permit. That’s fine, except for the fact that the Mubarak government intentionally delayed the permitting process. Churches would have to wait years for permits—some churches are still waiting. Mubarak pretended to fix this problem when he handed permitting control over to the 28 regional governors, but wait times for a permit didn’t get any better.

They were also discriminated against when it came to appointments to high-level government and military posts. There were only a handful of Christians in the upper ranks of the

security services and armed forces. There was one Christian governor out of 28, one elected Member of Parliament out of 454 seats, no known university presidents or deans, and very few legislators or judges. According to the State Department, public university training programs for Arabic-language teachers exclude non-Muslims because the curriculum involves the study of the Koran.

Other discrimination was official for everyone to see. Under Egyptian law, Muslim men can marry Christian women but Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

And sometimes discrimination progressed to outright violence against Christians. In September 2010, in the Omraneya district of Cairo, Egyptian authorities reportedly used excessive force and live ammunition on peaceful demonstrators protesting the government’s continued refusal to approve a license to build a local church extension. Two people, including a teenager, were killed, and dozens were wounded. No one has been brought to justice.

When the government was using excessive force, it was radical Islamists. On January 1, 2011, a bomb detonated in front of a Coptic church, Al Qiddissin (Two Saints), in Alexandria, where a New Year’s prayer service was being held. At least 23 Christians were killed and nearly 100 wounded in the worst sectarian attack on Christians in Egypt in more than a decade. On January 23, then-Interior Minister Habib El-Adly asserted that conclusive evidence pointed to a militant group, Army of Islam, as responsible for the attack.

On January 11, 2011, an off-duty police officer opened fire in a train in Minya province, killing one Christian and injuring five others. The shooter, a Muslim, was charged with murder and will be tried in a state security court. The Ministry of Interior denied the shooting was sectarian.

When the revolution came, thousands of Christians fueled the protests, yearning for a new government that would respect the religious beliefs of its own people. But just a few weeks after the revolution, it became clear that Christians were actually in more danger.

During the revolution, a bunch of bad guys escaped prison. To protect themselves, monks at the Anba Bishoy monastery north of Cairo built a security wall. Well, the Egyptian military didn’t like that very much, so in late February they tore down the wall with machine guns and bulldozers. You can see video online of monks running for cover as the military is opening fire with heavy machinery. A monk and six church workers were injured in the process.

In February the governor of el-Minya, demolished 10 Coptic homes because the owners of those homes refused to contribute one-fifth of their property to build a mosque.

In early March in Cairo, 13 people were killed and nearly 150 wounded in clashes that erupted during large-scale demonstrations by Christians protesting the destruction of a church in the provincial town of Sol. The demonstrators called for the rebuilding of the church, punishment of perpetrators, and better treatment by Egyptian authorities. Some of the demonstrations reportedly blocked major highways. According to some accounts, the Egyptian military stood by for as long as four hours without intervening in the clashes.

On March 20, in Gena, Salafists, including an off-duty policeman, accused a Copt named

Ayman Mitri of renting an apartment to a prostitute, cut off one of his ears and mutilated his other ear. The attackers then informed the police that they had carried out the punishment required by Islamic law. As was usual under Mubarak, the police refrained from pressing charges and called for a “reconciliation” meeting between the religious communities. The Christian man agreed to compensation during the reconciliation session instead of pursuing criminal charges because the extremists allegedly threatened his family.

Also as under Mubarak, the authorities’ refusal to punish attacks on Christians has led to more attacks. On March 23, Salafists surrounded St. George’s church in Beni Ahmad and successfully demanded that a church expansion approved by the government be stopped. On March 27, they blockaded St. Mary’s church in Giza, saying it did not have a permit. After yet another “reconciliation” meeting between Copts and Muslims, services at the church were forbidden until it acquired a new permit.

On March 28, Salafists attacked a liquor store in Kasr El-Bassil owned by a Copt, destroyed other stores, and demanded that coffee shops be closed. One villager was killed and eight others injured. On April 5, hundreds occupied St. John the Beloved church in Kamadeer, stopping repairs after heavy rain, and told Copts that they were not allowed to pray there anymore. After yet another “reconciliation,” Copts were told to build a church 200 meters away, one without a dome, cross, bell, or any other external feature marking it as a church.

Beginning on April 15, over 10,000 demonstrators, mostly Salafists, protested in the southern province of Qena against the appointment of a new governor, Emad Mikhail, who is a Christian (the previous governor, Magdy Ayoub, was also Christian). Protesters blocked main roads, stopped buses to separate men and women passengers, and disrupted the main rail route in Upper Egypt for eight days. There were threats to bar Mikhail from the province and even to kill him. Tensions ran so high that local Christians stayed inside and couldn’t celebrate Palm Sunday. The armed forces refused to intervene, and, although Egypt’s cabinet initially rejected calls for the governor’s resignation, on April 25, Prime Minister Essam Sheraf surrendered and said he would “freeze” the appointment for three months.

On April 28, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for the first time recommended to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Egypt be labeled a “Country of Particular Concern (CPC).” This designation refers, as commission chair Leonard Leo noted, to “the world’s worst religious freedom violators and human rights abusers.”

The abuse continues, with the worst violence against Christians in decades.

On October 9 thousands of peaceful demonstrators marched in downtown Cairo to protest the attack of a Coptic Christian church and called for an end to the systematic discrimination against Copts by the Egyptian authorities. At some point in the protest, violent clashes erupted between the protesters and the Egyptian military forces. Video shows Egyptian military tanks speeding through crowds and running over protesters. At one point, the Egyptian State Television aired a message calling on “honorable citizens” to