

active intellectuals long committed to international norms and practices of human rights, the rule of law, and equal rights of individual citizenship—all essential for democracy and hence for making these countries partners in building societies where all faiths can live and prosper.

We are compelled to ask: Why are the Christians currently being killed or driven out? These communities represent openness to others and a desire for truth, even if inconvenient. They love learning and seek an equal share in building their respective nations. They do not believe in retaliation and embrace forgiveness. They respect individual life as an end in itself not as a means. These are attributes many Muslims also share and ones that any country would appreciate.

Even as we pledge to do all within our power to alleviate the suffering of Christians and other small religious communities in the Middle East, we urgently appeal for action from our government to recognize and act upon the unique plight of these religious communities.

It is our conviction that American foreign policy can be more effectively used to advocate for policies that protect international religious freedom for all. We welcomed President Obama's public remarks regarding his March 27 meeting with Pope Francis, concerning his reaffirmation that "it is central to U.S. foreign policy that we protect the interests of religious minorities around the world." As a matter of conscience, we, therefore, respectfully call for the following actions:

I. Appointment of the Special Envoy on Middle East Religious Minorities. A new special envoy post, filled by a prominent and knowledgeable citizen is needed for deep engagement in the issues and circumstances affecting Christians and other small religious communities in the region. Over 20 special envoy posts exist to protect a range of other groups and interests but none is dedicated to the plight of Middle Eastern religious minorities. American policies continue to be formed without adequately taking into account the impact they might have on these vulnerable communities. A high caliber envoy of stature who has the ear of the President could increase American engagement regarding Middle Eastern religious minorities, so that:

The views and interests, including physical safety and equal rights as citizens, of the members of small, defenseless groups are considered in any peace negotiations concerning Syria.

Every diplomatic effort is made to press other governments in the region to stop facilitating, harboring, and assisting any extremist groups and militias, and to foster respect for the defenseless religious communities.

Other policies to promote tolerance and respect for members of vulnerable religious communities in the Middle East are considered at the highest levels while there is still time to act.

It was just such a special envoy who helped draw attention to genocidal levels of religious and ethnic persecution in Sudan and usher in a comprehensive peace agreement to end the north-south conflict there in 2005.

II. Review of Foreign Aid. As he has done in the interest of other stated administration priorities, President Obama should initiate an internal review to ensure that American assistance programs, especially those that support national governments, uphold policies and principles that relate to religious freedom and pluralism. The review should include examining the region's national textbooks, local governmental broadcasting, statements by public officials, and national identity cards, where the inclusion

of one's religious identity is often used to deny rights. U.S. government-sponsored broadcasting, legal and constitutional assistance, and educational efforts should promote religious tolerance and protect religious freedom, including for small religious groups.

III. Refugee & Reconstruction Assistance. Our principal purpose in speaking out is to help Christian communities and other defenseless religious groups remain safely in the region. To that end, the vulnerable religious minorities, including those who are refugees in neighboring countries or displaced within their home countries, must have equitable access to American refugee, humanitarian, repatriation, and reconstruction aid. Many will need assistance to be relocated elsewhere in the region and American help could be decisive. The U.S. government must ensure that religious minorities are not discriminated against by local authorities in the distribution of aid donated by the U.S. government, as was reported to have occurred at certain junctures in Iraq, contributing to the wholesale exodus of its Christians and other small religious communities. It must also continue to reach Christians and others who eschew UN refugee camps that they perceive to be controlled by extremist groups. In some particularly tragic instances, we recognize that individual members of defenseless religious communities will never be able to return to their homes, and urge that those individuals be given fast track asylum in the United States and elsewhere in the West.

#### CONCLUSION

A generation ago, American religious leaders successfully mobilized support for the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. That law created the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and institutionalized regular State Department reporting on the status of religious liberty around the world. That legislation should be credited with helping to establish, as President Obama acknowledged at the National Prayer Breakfast last February, that "promoting religious freedom is a key objective of U.S. foreign policy." Now, new action is desperately needed by our churches, our government and our civil society institutions here in the United States, and by all people of good will to make that objective a reality. (Signatories are signing in their individual capacities and titles are included for identification purposes only.)

### IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

**HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 19, 2014*

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate National Military Appreciation Month and to honor the extraordinary bravery and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform by celebrating.

Each May, veteran and service organizations come together to hold events around the country to demonstrate their gratitude to current and former men and women in uniform and their families for their service to our country.

From Military Spouse Appreciation Day to Memorial Day, the month of May is a time when a grateful nation acknowledges and affirms the debt owed to those brave men and women who risked their lives to preserve the freedoms we too often take for granted.

It is important that we recognize and celebrate the tremendous role military personnel have played across the globe.

Texas is home to more than 130,000 active military personnel and more than 1,600,000 veterans, 30,000 of which are from the 18th Congressional District of Texas.

It has been an honor to represent these constituents and I am extremely proud of their service.

As we acknowledge our former, current and future military men and women, it is essential that we provide them with the resources necessary to help wounded warriors, veterans, and their families transition to civilian life.

That is why I was proud to cosponsor and help shepherd to passage H.R. 1344, Helping Heroes Fly Act, that was signed into law in 2013 and which facilitates expedited passenger screening at airports for service members who are severely injured or disabled, along with their families.

I also introduced H.R. 4110, the "Helping to Encourage Real Opportunity for Veterans Transitioning from Battlespace to Workplace Act of 2014," which provides strong incentives for employers to hire, retain, and employ veterans in positions that take maximum advantage of their skills and experience.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I recognize by the name the 53 brave men and women from my home city of Houston, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and gave the last full measure of devotion to their country.

They are: Krystal Fitts, Jorge Luis Velasquez, Cody Norris, Jacob Molina, Pedro Maldonado, Eduardo Loreda, Matthew Catlett, Zarian Wood, Andrew Roughton, Edgar Heredia, Joshua Molina, Steven Candelo, Scott McIntosh, Orlando Perez, Jeremy Ray, Benjamin Garrison, Rodney Johnson, Matthew Medlicott, Alan Austin, William Edwards, Eric Salinas, Danny Soto, Roy Jones, Terrence Dunn, Hector Leija, David Fraser, Benjamin Rosales, Kenneth Pugh, Alberto Sanchez, Walter Moss, Michael Robertson, Howard Babcock, Timothy Roark, Ivica Jerak, Phillip George, Keith Mariotti, Clinton Gertson, Dexter Kimble, Jesus Leon-Perez, Thomas Zapp, Eric Allton, Andrew Houghton, Juan Torres, Pedro Contreras, Adolfo Carballo, Scott Larson, Leroy Sandoval, Armando Soriano, Keelan Moss, A. Esparza-Gutierrez, Tomas Sotelo, Brian Matthew Kennedy, and Brian Craig.

God bless them. And may God bless the United States.

HONORING LYNN BUCHANAN,  
NEWBURY PARK BREAKAWAY  
FROM CANCER CHAMPION

**HON. JULIA BROWNLEY**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 19, 2014*

Ms. BROWNLEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Newbury Park cancer survivor and my constituent, Lynn Buchanan, who has been named a Breakaway from Cancer champion.

As a Breakaway from Cancer champion, Ms. Buchanan will be honored as part of the "Amgen Tour of California," the largest cycling race in the United States. Ms. Buchanan will lead the "Breakaway Mile," a special walk to the Tour of California finish line in Thousand