

Senate Joint Resolution No. 17

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 152

Senate Joint Resolution No. 17—Relative to Iraq.

[Filed with Secretary of State September 5, 2014.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SJR 17, Anderson. Iraq: religious freedom.

This measure would urge President Barack Obama's administration to expedite visa processing for Iraq's minority groups and to lift the refugee quota cap for Iraqi Christians in order to streamline the process of accepting them into the United States as refugees, would urge the Congress of the United States to pass House Resolution 663, and would urge the United States Department of State to work with, among others, the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Iraqi central government, and neighboring countries to help secure safe havens for those claiming amnesty from Iraq. The measure would also declare that there is an urgent need to protect religious minorities from persecution from the Sunni Islamist terrorist group the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as it expands its control over areas in northwestern Iraq.

WHEREAS, Iraq is currently embroiled in a political and religious insurrection stemming from an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-led offensive that began in the Anbar Province and has spread to key locations such as Mosul, Tikrit, and Samarra and continues to engulf the region in violence and instability; and

WHEREAS, ISIS is a transnational Sunni insurgency whose ideological and organizational roots lie in both al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Syria-based Jabhat al-Nusra and has a stated mission of establishing an Islamic state and a caliphate across the Levant through violence towards Shiites, non-Muslims, and unsupportive Sunnis; and

WHEREAS, Iraq's population is approximately 31,300,000 with 97 percent of that population identifying themselves as Muslim while the approximately 3 percent of religious minorities groups consist of Christians, Yazidis, Sabean Mandaean, Baha'is, Shabaks, Kakais, and Jews; and

WHEREAS, The Iraqi Christian population is estimated to be between 400,000 and 850,000 with two-thirds being Chaldean, one-fifth Assyrian, and the remainder consisting of Syriacs, Protestants, Armenians, and Anglicans; and

WHEREAS, The Iraqi Constitution provides for religious freedom by stating all of the following:

- (1) "No law may be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy";

(2) “No law may be enacted that contradicts the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in this Constitution”;

(3) “[This Constitution] guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabaeans”; and

WHEREAS, Over 500,000 people have been displaced by the current ongoing violence in Iraq while reports have surfaced of targeted harassment, persecution, and killings of Iraqi religious minorities by ISIS with little to no protection from the Iraqi government or other security forces; and

WHEREAS, ISIS recently issued a decree to all religious minorities stating: “We offer them three choices: Islam; the dhimma contract - involving payment of jizya; if they refuse this they will have nothing but the sword.”; and

WHEREAS, The fall of Mosul has sparked terror among the Christian population because for the first time in 1,600 years there was no mass held in the city; and

WHEREAS, Over 50 percent of Iraq’s Christian population has fled since the fall of Saddam Hussein, and 1,100,000 people of diverse religious backgrounds remain internally displaced while the government under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has not upheld its commitment to protect the rights of religious minorities; and

WHEREAS, Eighty-four thousand nine hundred two Iraqis resettled in the United States between 2007 and 2013 and over 300,000 Chaldean and Assyrians currently reside throughout the country; especially in California; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and the Assembly of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature of the State of California, on behalf of its citizens, declares that there is an urgent need to protect religious minorities from persecution from the Sunni Islamist insurgent and terrorist group the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as it expands its control over areas in northwestern Iraq; and be it further

Resolved, That the California Legislature calls on the United States Department of State to work with the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Iraqi central government, neighboring countries, the diaspora community in the United States, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Chaldean representative leaders in the United States, and other key stakeholders to help secure safe havens for those claiming amnesty from Iraq; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges the Congress of the United States to pass House Resolution 663, which also urges the United States to act swiftly on behalf of religious minorities that are under the constant threat of persecution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges President Barack Obama’s administration to expedite visa processing for Iraq’s minority groups and to lift the quota cap for Iraqi Christians in order to streamline the process of accepting refugees; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the Majority Leader of the Senate, to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, and to the author for appropriate distribution.

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