

SCOTT GARRETT
5TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

2244 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4465

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Congress of the United States
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Washington, DC 20515-3005

266 HARRISTOWN ROAD
GLEN ROCK, NJ 07452
(201) 444-5454

83 SPRING STREET
NEWTON, NJ 07860
(973) 300-2000

www.house.gov/Garrett

April 26, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As unrest continues in the Middle East, the United States must remain steadfast and vigilant in our defense of the rights of religious minorities in the region. Disturbing reports about the stark situation facing Christians in Egypt, Libya, Syria and other nations have consistently come out of the region since the start of the Arab Spring two years ago.

The plight of two Syrian bishops has recently come to my attention. His Eminence Paul Yazigi, Bishop of Aleppo and Alexandretta in the Orthodox Church of Antioch, and His Eminence John Ibrahim, Bishop of Aleppo in the Assyrian Church of the East, were kidnapped by armed gunmen as they returned to their dioceses from a visit to Turkey earlier this week. According to reports, the bishops were on a mission of mercy when their car was ambushed in the volatile border region. Their driver was killed by the militants, who have been described by the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights as Islamic militants from Chechnya.

Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, and other Christian and religious leaders worldwide have called for the bishops' release. As the representative of a congressional district with one of America's largest and most vibrant Syrian Christian communities, I deplore this kidnapping. Next week marks the start of Holy Week for Orthodox Christians, and I urge you to work for their release by Orthodox Easter Sunday, the holiest day of the year for this community. Please let me know by no later than May 1, 2013, as to what actions you plan to take on this issue of great importance to my constituents. I await your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Scott Garrett
Member of Congress