

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to you with increasing concern over the plight of Iraqi Christians displaced by the violence in the country, the majority of whom have sought refuge in the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq. Many of these people would like to come to the United States, but because the U.S. Consulate in Erbil does not process immigration visas they must embark on a life-threatening and virtually impossible journey through ISIS-controlled territory to reach the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Even if they manage to reach the Embassy, the Consular Section has temporarily suspended services provided by the immigration visa units. This situation makes it virtually impossible for Iraqi Christians and other religious minorities seeking to flee violence in Iraq to come to the United States. We respectfully request your assistance in resolving this matter.

According to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, there are approximately 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq and over 300,000 refugees fleeing the violence in Syria. Of these, about 1.4 million people are estimated to have sought refuge in Kurdistan, including tens of thousands of Christians and other religious minorities. While the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been responsive and generous in supporting the refugee population, the rapid growth of IDPs and refugees is causing severe strains on the Kurdish economy, which threatens to make living conditions even worse as the Kurds' ability to care for IDPs and refugees decreases. Unfortunately the U.S. Consulate in Erbil does not process immigrant visa applications, which is yet another roadblock for Iraqi Christians attempting to emigrate to other countries, including the United States.

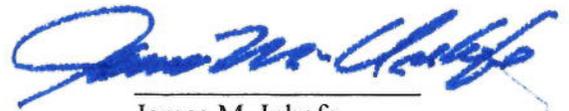
We understand the U.S. policy regarding a unified Iraq. However, allowing for the processing of immigrant visas in the place where the majority of the people seeking them live strikes us as a common-sense response to an urgent humanitarian crisis, not an effort to undermine U.S. support for a unified Iraqi state. Visa processing times are already notoriously slow, and allowing immigrant visas to be processed in Erbil could help alleviate this problem. It would also demonstrate to the U.S. Senate, the refugee population, and the world that the United States government is committed to helping the thousands Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities who have suffered enormously because of their faith.

We respectfully urge the State Department to allow the U.S. Consulate in Erbil to process immigrant visas. If no change in policy is planned, please justify the current policy and explain how it is adequate in addressing the needs of the growing refugee population in Kurdistan. Finally, please provide an update on the visa processing situation at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and an estimate on when the Consular Section will resume providing full immigrant visa services.

Sincerely,



Rob Portman  
U.S. Senator



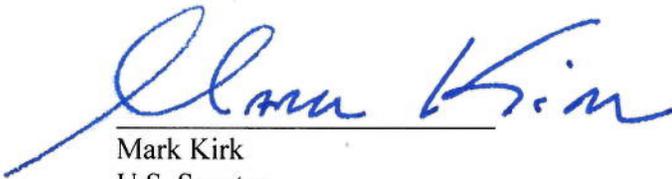
James M. Inhofe  
U.S. Senator



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



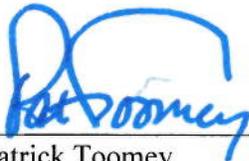
Roy Blunt  
U.S. Senator



Mark Kirk  
U.S. Senator



Jerry Moran  
U.S. Senator



Patrick Toomey  
U.S. Senator