

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW Ste 7276
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write today to express our deep concern regarding the precarious situation of the Christian community in Afghanistan.

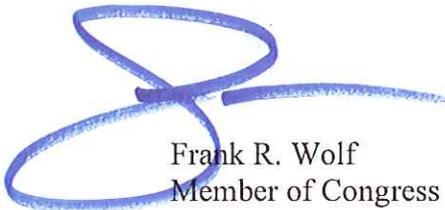
Enclosed please find an article from *The New York Times* detailing recent events. On May 27, Afghan television station Noorin TV began broadcasting inflammatory programs condemning foreigners for the conversion of Afghans to Christianity. Subsequently, on Tuesday, June 1, the *Associated Free Press* reported that Abdul Sattar Khawasi, the deputy secretary of the Afghan lower house of Parliament, called for the execution of Christian converts from Islam.

The United States has committed billions of dollars in assistance and American men and women have sacrificed their lives so that Afghans can enjoy the freedoms and liberties enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We ask that you please raise these issues at the highest level with the Afghan government.

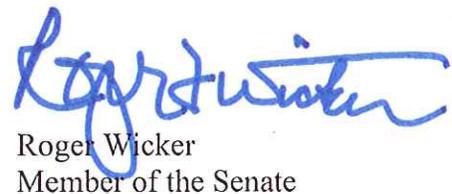
Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,



Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



Roger Wicker
Member of the Senate



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



Bob Inglis
Member of Congress



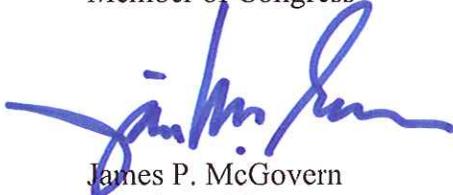
Anh "Joseph" Cao
Member of Congress



Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress



Trent Franks
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



Sue Wilkins Myrick
Member of Congress



Michele Bachmann
Member of Congress



Wally Herger
Member of Congress



Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



Dan Burton
Member of Congress



W. Todd Akin
Member of Congress

The New York Times

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May 31, 2010

Afghanistan Suspends Two Aid Groups

By ROD NORDLAND and ABDUL WAHEED Wafa

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Afghan government suspended the operations of two church-based relief groups on Monday over suspicions that they were involved in converting Afghans to Christianity, even though the evidence against them apparently consisted of nothing more than a listing in a telephone directory.

An Afghan television station, Noorin TV, broadcast photographs that it claimed showed Westerners' baptizing Afghans, both men and women, and other Afghans' praying to Jesus at private prayer meetings. It mentioned the two groups in the same report, although it had no evidence tying them to such activities, officials at Noorin TV confirmed.

Converting to any religion from Islam is a crime in Afghanistan, and proselytizing is also outlawed.

The suspended groups, Church World Service, an American organization, and Norwegian Church Aid, say they do not proselytize.

Both groups have major operations in Afghanistan, disbursing millions of dollars in aid. Church World Service employs 190 people, and Norwegian Church Aid 50 people in a variety of development programs here, the government said.

Students at Kabul University staged a protest on Monday in response to the television report, briefly blocking streets around the campus.

Mohammed Sediq Amarkhiel, a spokesman for the Ministry of Economy, which regulates aid groups working here, said there was no actual evidence against the two groups, which were known for "doing a good job here." However, Mr. Amarkhiel added, the ministry decided on the suspensions because the television reports "raised suspicions" and "made people very emotional and angry." The government will investigate the groups' activities, he said.

"If they are really involved in proselytizing Afghan people for Christianity, then definitely these people will be introduced to the judicial authorities," Mr. Amarkhiel said.

Evangelizing is a delicate issue in Afghanistan, a conservative Islamic country where there are no known native Christians and no formal churches, although some foreign embassies hold services within their own compounds. But many foreign nongovernmental organizations and aid groups here are supported by Christian groups abroad.

Foreign aid groups have to make a "commitment that their activity will be based on the Constitution of Afghanistan," which forbids conversion from Islam, Mr. Amarkhiel said.

The television reports were shown last Thursday and Friday on Noorin TV, a small station in Kabul known as an antigovernment gadfly. Even the station's director, Muhammed Arif Noori, however, said Noorin TV had no evidence that the two aid groups had been involved in proselytizing. The report merely raised "suspicions" about the two groups after finding them in a local telephone directory of nongovernmental organizations and noticing that they each had the word "church" in their names, Mr. Noori explained in an interview.

The television reports showed photographs that were alleged to be of Christian baptisms as well as videotapes of Christian prayer meetings, held at what the station said were seven missionary safe houses in western Kabul. The baptisms, presided over by at least four Western men, were done by dunking Afghan men completely in full bathtubs and pouring buckets of water over the heads of Afghan women as they stood in empty bathtubs.

Atle Sommerfeldt, Norwegian Church Aid's general secretary, said "the N.C.A. is not engaged in missionary work anywhere in the world, and not in Afghanistan."

Mr. Sommerfeldt said most of the group's development work, concentrating on rural and agricultural development in four central and southern provinces, continued as usual because most of it was carried out by local Afghan partners who were not affected by the suspension.

"In Afghanistan, as elsewhere in the world, N.C.A. does not have a mandate to influence people to change religion," he said. "We hope and believe in a speedy and positive solution."

The group has an \$8 million budget for Afghan projects this year, according to Liv Snestrud, its Afghanistan program coordinator.

Maurice A. Bloem, deputy director of programs for Church World Service, said in a statement that proselytizing was against his organization's code of conduct, The Associated Press reported.

Last year, Al Jazeera broadcast a report showing evangelical Christian soldiers at an American base who were apparently discussing trying to convert Afghans to Christianity by distributing Bibles in Pashto and Dari, the country's two main languages.

The United States military responded that such activity was forbidden by military rules, and confiscated and destroyed the Bibles.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: June 5, 2010

Because of an editing error, an article on Tuesday about two church groups in Afghanistan that were ordered suspended by the government over suspicions that they were proselytizing misidentified, in some editions, the group with an \$8 million annual budget and misstated the affiliation of an official. The budget is for Norwegian Church Aid, not Church World Service, and Liv Snesrud is program coordinator for Norwegian Church Aid, not Church World Service.