

.....
(Original Signature of Member)

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES.

Calling for the protection of religious minority rights and freedoms in the Arab world.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. BRIDENSTINE submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on _____

RESOLUTION

Calling for the protection of religious minority rights and freedoms in the Arab world.

Whereas, on January 25, 2011, in Tahrir Square, Egyptian protestors found their voice when they successfully ended the 30-plus year rule of President Mubarak and began the work of creating a true democratic government, a government that supports and protects inalienable rights and freedoms, including the freedom of religion;

Whereas the fervor and spirit of these revolutions have taken wing in other Arab nations such as Tunisia, Libya, and Syria;

Whereas, reminiscent of the 1968 “Prague Spring” in the former Czechoslovakia, many have called this revolu-

tionary period an “Arab Spring”, where ordinary citizens have taken to the streets demanding an end to corruption, political cronyism, and government repression;

Whereas, in the midst of newly acquired freedoms, including those of speech, press, and assembly, it is extremely important that religious minorities in these countries be protected from violence and guaranteed the freedom to practice their religion and to express religious thought;

Whereas Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance”;

Whereas the freedom to worship by minority religious communities in Arab nations has come under repeated and deadly attack in recent months;

Whereas, on November 1, 2010, the deadliest ever recorded attack on Iraqi Christians occurred at the Sayidat al-Nejat Catholic Cathedral located in central Baghdad, where militants stormed the church and detonated 2 suicide vests filled with ball bearings, killing 58 and wounding 78 parishioners;

Whereas, on January 1, 2011, a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the Saint George and Bishop Peter Church in Cairo, killing 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians, a Christian minority group that accounts for 9 percent of Egypt’s population of 80,000,000;

Whereas the freedom to proselytize by minority religious communities in Arab nations has also come under repeated

and deadly attack in recent months through so-called blasphemy laws that are punishable by death;

Whereas, on January 4, 2011, Governor Salman Tasser, who courageously sought to release Aasia Bibi, a Christian woman and mother of 5 who was sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, was gunned down by his own security guard because of his support for reforming the blasphemy laws;

Whereas, on March 2, 2011, Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's only Christian cabinet member and passionate supporter of interfaith tolerance and repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy law, was assassinated by multiple gunmen, leaving his body and vehicle riddled with 80 bullets and anti-Christian pamphlets strewn over his body; and

Whereas, on February 21, 2013, Sherry Rehman, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, and a vocal proponent of repealing Pakistan's blasphemy law, was herself accused of blasphemy, and the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered police in the central Pakistani city of Multan to investigate: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) recognizes, in this spirit of Arab Spring rev-
3 olution, that religious minority freedoms and rights
4 must be protected; and

5 (2) urges in the strongest terms that the
6 United States Government lead the international ef-
7 fort to repeal existing blasphemy laws.